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Gay Asian Migrants and the Problem of Desirability: Racism and Sexuality on Gay Mobile
Dating Apps

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Abstract

As sexual migrants who emigrate to liberal countries such as New Zealand that are more accepting of their sexuality, gay Asian migrants often rely on gay mobile dating applications to find sexual belonging by connecting to the wider gay community in a new environment. These dating apps not only allow them to seek sexual gratification, but are also crucial for new gay migrants to establish local connections quickly. Although these apps are convenient for users, they are also spaces in which problematic issues become manifest. Among these are forms of online racism, the one-size-fits-all design of these apps that universalises experience and sexual representation, and the reflection of values and standards that are deeply rooted in a Westernised gay community. This thesis addresses the many forms of racism that are found in three apps that are popular in New Zealand, namely Grindr, Jack'd, and Blued, through the experience of gay Asian migrants. It also seeks to understand how these apps and the issues they have created affect gay Asian migrants' representation online, their sense of sexual belonging, and their overall social position in the local gay community. This thesis utilises a mixture of methodological approaches, consisting of examination of the apps' interface designs, discourse and content analysis of gay Asian migrants' profiles in these apps, and in-depth interviews with gay Asian migrants. The findings from the various methods employed suggest that these three apps mirror the standards and practices of the local gay community in marginalising gay Asian migrants, and that they are vessels in which racism manifests in tangible and visible forms. However, these apps are also being transformed from sex-focused media to a broader social media format similar to that of Facebook and Instagram that encourages authenticity and consistent on/offline identity. These changes signify the possibilities of gay Asian migrants' escape from the highly racialised carnality and corporeality that were previously demanded by these apps. This thesis not only locates and examines the elusive gay community through these apps, but it also marks changes that could signify a positive future for gay Asian migrants in and outside of these apps.

To you: You deserve to be loved too.

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I would like to thank my supervisors, Associate Professor Luke Goode and Professor Misha Kavka, for making this research project engaging and rewarding. Without their dedication and support, this project would have been impossible. This thesis is also dedicated to the eight men who share their stories with me; their stories not only enriched the project, but they have granted me valuable lessons about life. I would like to thank my family for believing in me and allowing me to pursue my dreams. Finally, I thank my partner Bryce Good for going through this journey with me.

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Introduction and research overview

This thesis situates itself in a relatively young and still emerging field of study, namely, new queer studies, which examines sexualities across different countries. New queer studies has been developed as a result of scepticism about traditional Western academic approaches to queer and sexuality discourses; the approach has been selected as appropriate for this study on the basis of a shared suspicion that such Western discourses might not reflect the lived experience of gay Asian men. This research attempts to chart the lived experience specifically of gay Asian male migrants in their host country of New Zealand, as well as their previous experience in their countries of origin, through the use of mobile dating applications in New Zealand.

The primary focus of this research will address the identity of gay Asian male migrants and what it means to be such a migrant in New Zealand. Through analysing practices on mobile dating applications, the project will explore how new identities and life experiences can be created by for them in New Zealand. The project will thus look at how these applications are 'glocalised' by local users, which is to say how globalised dating applications are moulded and tailored through the interaction of local users to reflect as well as shape the characteristics of local gay identity and culture. The aim is to reveal how gay Asian male migrants and New Zealand gay male users of these applications create meanings that are pertinent to local culture and identity.

Furthermore, this research will also look at how users of these applications negotiate transnational gay Asian culture in the context of an already established local gay Western culture in New Zealand. In other words, how do these applications enable users to negotiate tensions between these two cultures that are seemingly similar but different? Does transnational gay Asian culture challenge the already established local gay culture or enrich it further? This research project's significance arises from tracing the creation of globalised and glocalised sexual identities as a result of the encounter of one culture with another, both because of t\migration and the mediated processes of mobile dating applications. There is potential, in turn, to create a new form of sexual hybridisation within a location-specific diaspora, and it is worth investigating to what extent this new form of hybridised identity shapes gay identity and gay culture in New Zealand. In addition, this research will also investigate how this newly formed hybridised sexual identity transforms the lived experience of gay Asian migrants in New Zealand as they move from one space to another, one political system to a different one, and from Eastern to Western cultural frameworks.

This research acknowledges the complex identity of gay Asian migrants, and will examine the possibly triply marginalised identity of this group as gay, Asian, and migrant. It also examines the current social position of the Asian community, which was once considered "undesirable and subjected to explicit discrimination in immigration, and naturalisation legislation" (Ip, 1996, p.9). By studying Asian migration history and patterns, which inform the contextual background for this research, it examines whether the familiar notion of an 'Asian Invasion' still permeates New Zealand, and how this might impact on gay Asian migrants' identity and their place in the local gay community.

Gay dating mobile applications are often used as a tool of transition for gay Asian migrants, helping them integrate into the local scene. However, the commonly found discrimination against or hostility towards gay Asian migrants by other users in these applications may deter them from feeling at home in their host country, thus potentially contributing to feelings of alienation. On the other hand, these gay mobile dating applications could contribute to the accepting attitude of gay New Zealanders towards gay Asian migrants, which may help to foster a new and unique hybridised gay identity that is specific to New Zealand. This thesis will contribute to the under-explored area of sexuality studies in New Zealand, taking an interdisciplinary approach by incorporating theories of migration and new media studies with new queer studies. Given that gay Asian migrants are increasingly an integral part of New Zealand, this research will provide more insight into what has remained a relatively hidden culture.

0.1. Gay mobile dating apps

Gay mobile dating applications are a reflection of the current state of gay male culture. Since the first application, Grindr, was introduced in 2009, these applications have become integral to contemporary urban gay culture, as they define the era of mobility and globalised networks. These applications are designed to be used across the globe, attracting users from all around the world to connect on a platform that promises a utopia of sexual gratification, identity expression, and equal access. In many ways, gay mobile dating apps are an extension of modern gay communities around the world, and they are increasingly being seen as representing the attitude of these gay communities.

Nonetheless, the 'gay utopia' that the applications promise is plagued by discrimination and a 'one size fits all' system that fails to cater to different sexual identities. This is evident in numerous disgruntled and angry opinions in media columns and articles, as users from different ethnic groups feel themselves to be

discriminated against and ignored on these platforms by other users (Cooper, 2012; Rodriguez, 2014; Stafford, 2012; Stephens, 2013; Woo, 2013). These media paratexts suggest that the climate within these applications should be carefully evaluated, since large-scale research on gay dating apps and the attitudes they support is still a relatively new area. By looking at attitudes expressed on profiles and by users, a number of which support the claims of discrimination and disinterest alluded to in the media paratexts (Roth, 2014), we will be able to examine the extent of segregation practices found in these applications. Slogans such as 'no fats, no femmes, no Asians, and no blacks' are now part of the reality of these applications. These slogans are a good indication of the 'mainstream' gay community's norms when it comes to expressions of desire and partner selection. In most Western countries where gay dating applications are popular, gay ethnic minorities continue to struggle to express their sexuality and desirability, due to the unspoken communal and collective standards that place great emphasis on Western beauty ideals.

The hostile environment of these applications is especially taxing on gay Asian migrants who rely on apps to establish social and sexual networks in their host countries. Being on the lower half of the 'desire hierarchy' hinders their quest for a sense of belonging in a foreign country, and within a community that they would like to participate in. As I will explain further, finding this sense of belonging and acceptance is crucial to gay Asian migrants because they are also sexual migrants (Carrillo, 2004), in the sense that finding ways to express their sexuality forms a major reason for why they migrate in the first place. While my thesis may not identify a pathway to the 'gay utopia' they often hope for, it does examine ways in which these applications might help them to counter the exclusions they have experienced.

My thesis will thus illustrate how sexual citizenship and issues such as inequality and discrimination are also being challenged and redefined by these applications in different ways. Firstly, these globalised applications produce a 'gay traffic' that disrupts national and regional criteria for obtaining legitimate sexual citizenship within a particular locality. As the criteria for becoming a legitimate sexual citizen is never self-evident nor static, these three apps (Grindr, Jack'd, and Blued) not only indicate what a legitimate sexual citizen might look like in New Zealand, but they also highlight the notion of sexual citizenship is socially constructed and potentially open to change, as it can be subverted and altered. Secondly, gay mobile dating applications serve as a hub/juncture for gay men from diverse locations to pass through, allowing them to introduce different cultural representations and practices of sexuality that are pertinent to their ethnic/cultural background. The introduction of diverse sexualities and practices subsequently challenges the hegemonic Western understanding of a 'one size fits all' homosexuality. Thirdly, gay mobile dating applications become the 'critical

arena' in which gay Asian migrants strategically perform their sexuality, thus gaining sexual citizenship as a result. This thesis is organised and structured according to three important discourses: migration, sexuality, and technology. Before exploring the premises of the thesis, I will discuss the concept of sexual citizenship and sexual migrants to provide context for my investigation and findings.

0.2. Research Questions

This thesis is guided by four research questions:

1) To what extent, and in what ways, do gay dating mobile applications assist with or hinder the integration/assimilation of gay Asian migrants into the gay community in New Zealand?

Since mobile communication tools such as dating applications offer convenience and mobility as well as other positive social networking benefits, what would be the drawback of such applications? This research question examines dating applications as a medium and queries how successful they can be in terms of assisting gay Asian migrants to integrate into the local gay community in New Zealand.

2) What role(s) do gay mobile applications play in gay Asian migrants' lived experience of New Zealand's gay community?

The aim of this research question is to examine the function and role of these mobile dating applications in gay Asian migrants' life in New Zealand. Depending on individuals' situations, some gay Asian migrants might use these applications as a convenient medium for sexual gratification, while some might use it as a private medium for communication with other gay men for various purposes, like friendships or partnerships.

3) To what extent do gay mobile dating applications help gay Asian migrants negotiate their own culture, the host country's culture as well as the gay community's culture?

This question focuses on the multi-layered identity that gay Asian migrants have to construct to deal with different facets in their lives such as familial responsibilities from their own cultural background, conforming to local cultural expectations in their lifestyle, as well as playing by the 'rules' of the local gay community in order to fit in.

4) In what ways do the technological affordances offered by these applications cultivate a platform-specific culture and shape their users' social behaviour and expectations?

As this research will argue, the material framework of these applications such as their design and user interface (UI) plays a significant role in shaping the culture in these applications. These technological affordances could influence users' social behaviour and expectations, and potentially assist in promoting problematic racial categorisation. Moreover, these affordances could encourage and uphold tropes of hyper-masculinity as a desirable and preferred presentation on these platforms, even though not everyone can attain such an ideal presentation.

0.3. Thesis Structure

This thesis is structured according to a deductive format. Chapter One reviews the literature and frameworks that illustrate the tensions between migration, sexuality, and technology. Surveying the apps themselves, Chapter Two examines the overall design and interfaces of these three apps and maps out the relevant frameworks and methods that are used to produce research findings. Following the frameworks established in Chapter Two, Chapter Three applies these methods and produces an analysis of the interfaces of these apps, and discusses how they structure the interactions among users as well as the impact they have on users. In Chapter Four, in-depth interviews with eight gay Asian migrants are presented to illuminate the issues that they are facing in the apps as well as the community. Building on these narratives of gay Asian migrants, Chapter Five examines actual user profiles of gay Asian migrants across three apps (Grindr, Jack'd and Blued), and discusses how gay Asian migrants represent themselves on these apps. Chapter Six re-situates the previous discussions in an attempt to define what a gay community should look like in New Zealand, underscored by the rapid development of mediated relationships created by these apps. Finally, the last chapter concludes with the current state of the gay community, speculating how these apps should be integrated into the gay community, as well as offering recommendations for future research.

0.4. Methodology overview

This section provides an overview of the research methods that I have adopted, and it outlines the specifics of each method that was used to collect relevant data. As this is an overview, more detailed discussion and description of each of these methods are presented in the subsequent chapters. For this research project, a

mixed-method approach proved to be the best way to capture the intersections amongst the three broad and distinct categories that this thesis encompasses: sexuality, migration, and technology. These disciplinarily different fields require different approaches in order to capture the data that is needed for this project. To carry out such an investigation has challenged me to devise a unique research framework that would help me gain insights into the connections and overlaps amongst these fields. To simplify my methodology, I have divided my research into three stages that complement each other:

1) Walkthrough analysis (Light et al., 2015) of the three selected apps, surveying the digital architecture and interface designs of these apps (Chapter Two and Three);
2) Content analysis of user-generated content, which in this case means users' actual profiles (Chapter Five);
3) In-depth semi-structured interviews with gay Asian migrants in New Zealand who use these apps (Chapter Four).

The first stage of this research involved a survey of the interface designs of these apps; the researcher took note of what these apps look like aesthetically, as well as noting the features and functions that are offered to users. Three of the most common features across all of the apps were selected and examined closely. The second stage involved a content analysis that not only quantified the users' profile in terms of selected categories, but also examined the recurring patterns and themes found within the coding process. The third stage followed a phenomenological approach, seeking to 'understand an experience from the participants' point of view' (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001, p. 157). By conducting in-depth interviews, the common patterns in people's perceptions of their experiences were able to be identified (Williams, 2007). Their experiences are then used to compare to findings from the other methods, in order to concretise those findings.

When combined, these different methods form a unified narrative framework that illuminates the lived experience of gay Asian migrants in New Zealand who use these apps, and shows how they navigate their social position in ways that are pre-determined by these apps. The validity of the framework is secured by the deductive methodology, which allows the researcher to verify the data from each stage by connecting it to findings from other stages, which consequentially legitimises the data collected. For instance, when the researcher found evidence of racist profiles on these apps, the existence and effects of these profiles were further verified by interview participants, thus concretising a specific phenomenon. This also helps to avoid the overly narrow objectivity that may result from a one-sided perspective.

The greatest benefit of a mixed-method approach is the possibility that these stages may influence and reflect on each other. This allows different sets of data to speak to each other, which in turn creates a transparent process whereby these data can be cross-verified. For example, my walkthrough analysis in stage one suggested that the design of these apps' interfaces is restrictive and overly generalised, especially when it comes to ethnic representation. However, I had difficulties confirming this argument. This is when the other two methods became crucial to the investigation, as the interviews provided a more in-depth, critical perspective of these interfaces, while the content analysis revealed that gay Asian migrants are also actively challenging the restrictive representational affordances of the interfaces.

Although different methods are used in this research, the risk of 'muddling method' (Stern, 1994), which jeopardises the validity of research, is reduced by having a three-stage data collection process that is independent but interconnected. Each stage also faithfully follows the traditional data-collecting approach that is pertinent to that particular method.

0.4.1. Apps: interface designs and content analysis of users profiles

Three specific apps have been selected for this research. They are Grindr, Jack'd, and Blued. The project acknowledges there are numerous apps in the market currently, but these three apps are the most commonly adopted ones in New Zealand by far, trending as the most downloaded dating apps targeted at gay men from Apple's app store at all times. These apps are also carefully selected from other gay dating apps on the market currently because they each represent different segments and needs in the market, which indicates that there are distinct needs amongst what is often assumed to be a universal and uniform gay community and/or sexuality. The types of demographics of these apps are informed by the researcher's ethnographic field observation throughout this research project, which is then noted down in the research journal; in Chapter Five, interview participants also noted similar demographic details within these three apps that are consistent with the field observation.

Grindr, introduced in 2009, is still the most popular app in the market in comparison to the other two. The app is widely used in 196 countries and has 3.6 million users worldwide (grindr.com, n.d). In the research context of New Zealand, Grindr represents the dominant market share due to its seniority and its reputation for being the 'pure hookups app'; it also has significantly more White users in New Zealand in comparison to the other two.

Jack'd, introduced in 2011, represents a different segment of the market, as it is predominantly used by gay Asian men/migrants in New Zealand, with some White users on it as well. This app is used in 180 countries worldwide and has 1.2 million users (jackd.com, n.d.). Jack'd is often treated as the alternative space to Grindr, and it is seen as more 'Asian-friendly' for gay Asian users.

For a point of comparison, Blued, launched in 2012, was selected to further highlight the different needs of the gay community. As a Chinese-lead platform, Blued is hugely popular in China, with 40 million users that are mainly located in China (blued.com, n.d.). However, it has a substantial number of users in New Zealand as well due to the influx of Chinese migrants into the country. The user demographic of Blued is similar to that of Jack'd, with mainly Chinese migrants and students. Blued is also significantly different than the two other apps, as it is a gay dating app with social affordances similar to those provided by Facebook and Instagram.

The different localities in which these apps are produced and circulate influence the type of interactive affordances that these developers can or cannot provide. Not only does the selection of these three apps highlight the myth of a truly globalised and universalised gay sexual identity, but it also highlights that there are discrepancies within any 'uniform' gay identity.

For the first stage of research, I employed what Light et.al (2015) call the 'Walkthrough method' (see Chapter Three for a detailed framework description). This is a new framework to study mobile apps specifically, which asks the researcher to carefully consider every aspect of an app to tease out the creators' agenda. This ranges from the proprietor of a particular app and the context in which the app is created, to its design, its governance, user demographics and so on. While using or 'walking through' the app itself, these aspects are considered by the researcher, which allows for an elaborate picture of these apps to emerge. In relation to this method, the interface design of each app is noted and examined, such as the size of user profiles, the features that each app offers to its users, the selections of identity markers that are provided by the apps' creators to their users, and so on. All of this allows the researcher to determine the agendas which drive these apps. In this research, five of the most common but important features (filtering system, user profiles, pictures, communication features, and paid-features) have been highlighted for in-depth discussions.

The second stage of this research looks at how user-generated content is created and represented on these apps, and connects this content to the overall structure of these apps as collated in stage one. One hundred profiles of gay Asian migrants were purposively sampled. Users' profiles were captured via screenshot by the

researcher on his mobile phone. To discern whether a profile belongs to a gay Asian migrant, the researcher established a set of criteria. First, any profile that mentions migrant status, such as 'working in New Zealand', 'studying in New Zealand', or 'recently moved to New Zealand', was noted; second, ethnicity was verified through their profile photos, their ethnic identity selection, as well as written statements that explicitly state the user is Asian. These profiles were categorised into four categories based on how often they referenced race-related discourses, and how they are presented. These profiles were examined systematically in terms of the user profile photos, the name on the profiles, their selected ethnic category, as well as the profile statement. These are the four most important elements of any profile, and they are the consistent features across all of the apps studied, which in turn provides a consistent basis for the analysis of all three apps. A more detail method is provided in Chapter Five.

0.4.2 Qualitative interviews

The final data set gathered for this research arose from face-to-face semi-structured interviews with research participants. Eight participants were recruited and interviewed for one to two hours each. The number of participants for my project warrants a significant examination in itself. The recruitment process for this project has been slow and at times I struggled to find participants who would be willing to talk about such a private and sensitive topic. According to Poon and Ho (2008), sex and sexuality are "very sensitive topics and are rarely permitted to be discussed openly" (p. 248) in Asian culture. Several of my participants share this concern, as they point out the risks associated with talking about such sensitive issues, such as being identified, family disownment, breaching Confucian upbringing to not talk about one's private family affairs to another person, etc. Moreover, the research participants required for this project had to have a very specific identification: gay, Asian and, most significantly, a migrant. To find participants that occupy these three identities simultaneously and to convince them to participate proved challenging. Furthermore, the population of the gay community in Auckland, New Zealand is relatively small, and this also has an impact on whether people will want to speak out in such a closely knit community. Potential research participants might also resist taking part in a study of this nature due to their fear of being portrayed as deviant (Gamson, 2000). The recruitment process thus required trust to be built. Some of the research participants only came forward when they were introduced through mutual networks shared by both the researcher and the participants, and some of the participants expressed discomfort and uneasiness about talking to someone directly about their sexuality and experience. In contrast, however, other participants felt comfortable talking to a stranger about an issue of such a sensitive nature without fear of any personal judgement.

A small sample size in qualitative research like this is not uncommon (Christian, 2005; Marlow, 2005). It is also not of concern because the interview data serves as a complement to the rich data collected from 100 individual mobile dating app profiles, as discussed in Chapter Five. In this way, the qualitative interviews complete the triangulation of my primary data collection, alongside the walkthrough method and profile sampling.

To ensure their confidentiality, all the names of the participants are pseudonymised. The participants are each assigned with an initial for when they are quoted in the chapter to protect their identity. Their background is described in a way that will not expose them to the risk of being identified. None of the research interviews was carried out over these apps, mainly due to the ethical concern that anyone can have access to these private chats, as well as the legal liability that is imposed by the administrators of these apps. The fine print of these apps explicitly forbids recruiting being done on the platforms, and thus the researcher was unable to advertise on the platforms, let alone interview in the chatroom. Moreover, objectivity can be compromised if the researcher were to select interview participants on these platforms that he deems suitable. Therefore, the participants were recruited via snowball sampling and advertisement around the campus, as well as on private Facebook groups, and they came forward by themselves without any direct influence from the researcher himself.

The interview questions were divided into and guided by three major components, framed as open-ended questions: first, the background of the participants; second, their relationship to and impression of the local gay culture and gay community; third, their usage and experience of these apps. Semi-structured interviews also allowed the researcher to pursue intriguing and relevant comments that were made during the interview, although these aspects may not have been strictly written into the questions. The interviews were digitally recorded and were stored in encrypted folders in the researcher's computer for transcription purposes. Guided by constructivist grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998), my analysis of the interviews sought to identify "repeated patterns of happenings, events or actions/interactions that represent what people do or say, alone or together, in response to the problems and situations in which they find themselves" (p. 130). The interview transcripts were read several times, and I coded the transcripts initially based on keywords/phrases that were highlighted due to their repetition across some of the interviews. Using the keywords/phrases as a guiding tool, I identified the themes that consistently emerged across all of my interviews. These themes were then sorted into categories that best reflect the interview content and narratives.

These eight interviews were conducted in 2016 and therefore the views stated by interview participants are specific to that timeframe. Although the apps that they were using have gone through a few changes in the meantime, the way in which people communicate on the apps as well as the general attitude of the gay community towards non-White ethnicities have largely remained unchanged.

0.5. Ethnic position

I identify as a gay Asian migrant, who started this research to further my understanding of my own and others' social position through systematic research. I have also been a frequent user of these three apps since they were launched. Furthermore, I share a similar social background to all of my research participants, whereby my family is unaware of my sexuality. These specific positions have granted me an 'insider' position that has allowed me to navigate easily through these apps and understand the experience of my interview participants better. On the other side of the coin, these positions could arguably lead to biases or blind spots that can only be seen from a distance. This is where the three stages of research that I have discussed before come into play, with each offsetting the limitations of the other, which helps me to remain as objective as humanly possible.

My ethnic identity has potential impacts on the interview process. As noted by Robinson (2015), the researcher's own ethnic identity could influence the type of data yielded from interviews. My participants were comfortable talking to me about their experience of racism, both in the community as well as on these apps, and they were open to discussions about their sexuality in the context of their background. I am unsure whether the same conversations that my participants and I have shared would have happened if I were of another ethnic background. Therefore, I do acknowledge this fact and am critically aware of the potential consequences and influences that this factor could have played in my data analysis, data gathering, and conducting and transcribing the interviews.

I am also aware that my research participants are often well-educated (with an undergraduate degree or higher), and some of them are actively participating in local gay advocacy and communal events. They are often critical and well-aware of their social position, their power in relation to the gay community, as well as their ethnicity. These factors are significant for producing an insightful understanding of their experience, but I am also aware that not every gay Asian migrant is critical of their experience in the community. Therefore, the critical stances of my research participants are acknowledged as not representing the position of all gay Asian migrants, which has been factored into the analysis of their insights and experience.

I willingly acknowledge that my own engagement with the gay community, the apps, as well as my position of being a gay Asian migrant have contributed to the overall development of this research, and how I approach it. Subsequently, it also informs how the data have been interpreted and coded. Despite a good understanding of how my position might influence the overall research and its insights, as well as the initial fear of exposing my own sexuality to people who do not know about it through this research, this sensitive research topic that affects me and others in a similar position is important. As argued by other scholars, avoiding sensitive research topics "may be seen as evasion of responsibility and disempowering to the individuals involved" (Dempsey et al., 2016, p. 482). Since I am situated in the centre of this debate, as both a researcher and a member of the local gay community, I believe this research can be empowering for other gay Asian migrants and shed light for those who are interested to understand a vital part of a modern gay community: diversity. As a gay Asian migrant who is often fighting for my own standing in the gay community, it is in my own personal interest to see positive movements in the gay community toward becoming inclusive and diverse.

0.6. Limitations

The limitation of this research is mainly centred around the number of interview participants coming forward to talk about a sensitive issue, as well as having to reach out to a vulnerable population that is less likely to talk about their experience openly. Although the number of participants can be considered a limitation, it is compensated for by the quality of the interviewees' narratives, which are rewarding and insightful. The analysis acknowledges the difficulties experienced by gay Asian migrants to speak about their experience due to their often marginalised social positions, and it provides a vantage point for this research to investigate despite the limited number of interview participants. In other words, the interviews opened up a new direction for this project to embark on, by investigating how significantly gay Asian migrants are undermined and compromised in their host country by way of gay dating apps. This may further provide a new direction for any future project to pursue, namely, the reasons behind why so few gay Asian migrants are willing to share their account of the experience.

As these apps are constantly changing to fit current market needs better, this research is only able to study and factor in the changes of these apps within a set amount of time. This research presents these apps and notes their changes only within the last five years. Although these apps are changing rapidly, this research acknowledges that the communication habits people develop on these apps will not change as quickly as their design or hardware. Any future research of similar apps should consider the trajectory of the transformation of

these apps, so as provide comprehensive reasons for these changes and investigate how they might impact on the ways people communicate.

This research is primarily focused on the experience of a very specific group of people, namely, gay Asian migrants in New Zealand. Therefore, the study has not attempted to provide any direct discussion of the experience of gay men from other social positions and ethnicities, and does not make any claims to represent those positions.

Chapter One

Literature Review and Research Framework

The literature that needs to be examined in relation to this project is that which addresses the three major areas that this research examines: migration, sexuality, and technology. This chapter attempts to set out the larger context for the thesis, with more specific theories and frameworks offered in each subsequent chapter as needed. In this chapter, with the aid of relevant materials and literature, I will explore gay Asian migrants' status as sexual migrants who migrate because of their sexuality, and how they find their position in their chosen host country in order to establish themselves as legitimate sexual citizens. To do so, I will be discussing what constitutes a legitimate sexual citizen in the context of a predominantly White and western gay community and society at large. This chapter also addresses the different ways in which a sexual migrant can transition into his/her host country, namely either by assimilating or integrating. Furthermore, this chapter also looks at the possible frameworks to best approach non-Western sexuality, as existing frameworks are often insufficient to capture the overall lived experience of non-Western sexuality in a western locality. The last part of this review is focused on literature about mobile technologies and how they can serve as a centralised hub for various cultures flowing in and out of the hub, thus potentially creating a space for a different cultural identity to flourish. Furthermore, I also examine how these mobile technologies tend to universalise the user experience despite their diverse user demographics, and I look at how users could potentially subvert this imposition of a universalised experience through their self-representation.

1.1. Grindr'ing for acceptance: Sexual migrants and sexual citizenship

As part of the sense of belonging and acceptance that migrants seek in their chosen host countries in order to become fully fledged members of the society, gaining sexual citizenship in particular requires finding acceptance within a society or community. Sexual citizenship consists of having rights in relation to sexual practice and identity, such as the ability to represent ourselves, to perform the sexual identity that is pertinent to our culture, and to have control over our body as well as to be included within the selected society and community (Weeks, 1998). Having these rights is fundamental for gay Asian migrants to be able to take part in local gay culture and develop a sense of belonging. Obtaining sexual citizenship becomes crucial for gay Asian migrants due to the nature of their migration. On top of the common migration rationales such as economics, social policies, marriage and reproduction, some gay Asian migrants are also sexual migrants (Carrillo, 2004),

who are motivated to migrate because of their sexuality. Sexual migrants refers to a category of migrants who are prompted

> fully or partially, by [their] sexuality . . . including motivations connected to sexual desires and pleasures, the pursuit of romantic relations with foreign partners, the exploration for new self-definitions of sexual identity, the need to distance oneself from experiences of discrimination or oppression caused by sexual difference, or the search for greater sexual equality and rights. (Carrillo, 2004, p. 59)

The emphasis on migrants' sexuality and sexual subjectivity recognises that migrants do not always migrate solely for heteronormative reasons such as marriage and reproduction (Cantu, 2009; Luibhéid, 2008; Manalansan, 2003, 2006). Thus, achieving sexual freedom and acceptance in host countries directly affects their sense of belonging, and how well they integrate into society and community. The emergence of sexual migrants as a relatively new phenomenon alongside transnational travel highlights the urgent need to evaluate current patterns of how migrants subvert and gain sexual citizenship in their host countries. Carrillo's definition of sexual migrants weighs heavily on why sexual citizenship matters to them. By becoming a legitimate sexual citizen in their respective host country, sexual migrants fulfil their original purpose of migrating. However, as I will demonstrate below, the pathway to becoming a legitimate sexual citizen is harder than it seems, especially for ethnic minorities.

1.2. A legitimate sexual citizen: Whiteness, gay community, and citizenship

The definition of sexual citizenship is highly contested, and it can be grouped into two strands: rights-based research and critiques that unpack the contested nature of citizenship as a discourse. There are several strands of scholarship focusing on various aspects of what constitutes sexual citizenship and how it is being utilised in different contexts. For instance, some research focuses on the rights of individuals who embrace non-normative sexual identities and their demand for the right to be identified and accepted as they are (Bamforth, 2012; Cossman, 2007; Kaplan, 1997; Monro, 2015; Richardson, 2000; Richardson & Monro, 2012). These analyses focus on a variety of non-normative sexualities such as bisexual, transsexual (Evans, 1993; Hines, 2009; Whittle, 2002), intersex (Grabham, 2007), disabled (Shildrick, 2013; Siebers, 2008), lesbian mothers (Ryan-Flood, 2009), and sex workers (Sabsay, 2013), in relation to their pathway to gaining citizenship and rights. This body of research illustrates the highly contested nature of sexual citizenship for non-normative sexualities. Moreover, some scholars assert that sexual citizenship is embedded within a

heteronormative framework and thus a 'queering' of such a notion is necessary to open possibilities for including variety of sexual identities as legitimate sexual citizens (Bell & Binnie, 2000; Canaday, 2009; Phelan, 2010; Richardson, 1998; Weeks, 1998). Lastly, in the most important and relevant strand for my research, some scholars study sexual citizenship and its relationship to nationalism and territorialisation. Sexual citizenship, in this context, becomes a compelling response to cultural othering and border-making (Puar, 2007; Puar & Rai, 2002).

Since sexual citizenship has specific, pre-established criteria and prerequisites, these have to be fulfilled before an individual can claim such citizenship. Different groups and societies demand that various standards be met to obtain sexual citizenship. These standards, or criteria, are influenced by local politics and policies. I use the term 'legitimate' as a way of drawing a line between state-recognised sexual citizens on the one hand and both state- and community-recognised sexual citizens on the other. For instance, state-recognised sexual citizens refer to everyone who shares the same rights in relation to their sexuality as others; the concept of legitimate sexual citizens on the other hand denotes recognition from both the state, and most importantly, the gay community. In other words, one can be a sexual citizen in the eye of the state but still be an illegitimate sexual citizen in the eye of the community. This is not because the community rejects the legal rights of an individual, but because the community assesses the legitimacy of a sexual citizen largely based on popular but subjective discourses about desirability, ethnicity, and masculinity, instead of legal rights. In the context of my research, the legitimacy of sexual citizens in community terms leans heavily towards a hegemonic and westernised understanding of gay male identity.

For the focus of this research, I am looking at the criteria of sexual citizenship in New Zealand. These criteria are often based on ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality and immigration status, and those who fall outside of any of these categories are disqualified automatically. As I will argue throughout this chapter, the hegemonic and legitimate gay sexual citizen in New Zealand is constructed as a White, middle-class, well-educated adult New Zealand man with a masculine body. The community automatically casts those who fail to represent these criteria as an outsider or as an incomplete citizen, that is, one who is undesirable. New Zealand's gay Asian migrants often struggle to obtain legitimate sexual citizenship, as their social and biological identities readily disadvantage them from obtaining such a status. These problematic 'criteria' are ultimately the result of the attempt to universalise and prioritise western gay identity and desires, which are themselves influenced by neo-orientalist and (post) colonialist discourses. This in turn undermines the different practices and gay sexual identities relevant to localities in non-western cultures and countries. However, as the definition of what

constitutes legitimate sexual citizenship is not always self-evident and can be highly subjective, it can be contested, challenged, and subverted accordingly. Gay mobile applications have become the newest factor for both maintaining and potentially disrupting the standardised and westernised gay cultural practices and gay identity that are evident on these technological platforms, at times enabling gay Asian migrants to reconstitute what it means to be a legitimate sexual citizen in their own terms.

In New Zealand, queer citizens enjoy similar sexual rights to those found in other western societies. Queer citizens are entitled to marriage and other common law rights that are awarded to normative citizens. In other words, queer citizens in New Zealand are sexual citizens of the state, to the extent that it recognises sexual citizens and their rights beyond the heteronormative boundary. In the terms set out by Richardson's (2000) study of sexual citizenship, New Zealand's queer citizens are awarded three accessibilities that legitimatise their citizenship in society: the right to self-definition (using appropriate sexual identity markers, such as gay, lesbian, or trans and etc.), the right to practice a different sexuality, and the right to be recognised by the state. It is safe to claim that our local queer community is acknowledged by the government as a legitimate existence based on the fulfilment of these rights. From a legal and policy standpoint, the gay community and everyone who identifies as part of this community is arguably a sexual citizen. In the case of gay Asian migrants, becoming a sexual citizen in this host country equates to finding a space to express and explore their sexuality.

However, in my research, I argue that to be seen as a fully-fledged, legitimate, and functional sexual citizen goes beyond state recognition. My argument arises from a simple theoretical question: in whose eyes are these sexual citizens legitimate? Our focus should not stop at the policy level when it comes to defining what is legitimate sexual citizenship; rather, to assess whether someone's sexual citizenship is legitimate from a holistic standpoint, the community's definition of legitimacy must also be studied. To assess the community's view of a legitimate sexual citizen, then, we need to question the broader social and cultural position of the gay community, particularly in New Zealand. By unpacking how the local gay community assesses desirability as well as its attitude towards ethnicities, we will be able to deduce its members' perception of what a functional and legitimate sexual citizen should look like.

1.3. The global export: Westernised gay male identity

Gay men, although not unified by national identities or cultural similarities, are presumably connected by their shared sexual identity and the historical as well as contemporary struggles for obtaining equality (Callander,

2013). They (directly or indirectly) share a degree of responsibility to engage in social politics as a collective minority (Altman, 2002; Callander, 2013). This idea of shared goals and identity assumes that all gay men are united and enjoy equal status to one another. However, grouping diverse individuals from different cultures under one identity and reducing them into a simplistic label is problematic. By assuming that the gay community is homogenous and consists of only standardised behaviour and understanding, we risk ignoring the cultural and ethnic tensions that have always been at the centre of the community.

Gay men are not shielded or exempt from mainstream and broader discourses, especially those related to gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. The gay community is influenced by these broader discourses and, to a certain extent, even mimics what they have been rejecting as their original political aspiration: normativity. Research has indicated that there is an unspoken desire hierarchy, based on ethnicity, that is deeply rooted in the gay community. In Australia for instance, which has similar social and political conditions to New Zealand, research shows that the gay community operates according to an ethnically based hierarchy (Han, 2008; McBride, 2005; Teunis, 2007; Caluya, 2006; Riggs, 2013). Scholars are also finding consistent patterns of racialised hierarchies across other western gay communities, such as the US and the UK. This racialised hierarchy organises the community's desires into ranks, with White, middle-class, hegemonic masculine gay men sitting at the top. This also indirectly results in most western gay communities privileging 'White issues' (Callander, 2013; Teunis, 2007), such as same-sex marriage, and a White-centric position on whom as well as what gay men should desire. Furthermore, I argue that, by sitting on the top of the desire hierarchy, these gay men set the agenda and rules when it comes to beauty and desirability standards for the community. As Callander (2013, p.41) has neatly summarised it, "If Whiteness is viewed as a dominant feature of gay identity and gay community in the Western world, a 'mainstream' identity is therefore a White one as well."

This ideal of a gay White man embodying mainstream hegemonic (hyper)masculinity is what the community finds most desirable. Moreover, the entrenchment of hegemonic masculinity and Whiteness suggests that these features are solely available to White men, and unobtainable by anyone else (Ward, 2008). Thus, everyone else is assumed to be less masculine than White men and to hold   less power and legitimacy than the desirable members of the gay community. The ideal gay man or, as Mowlabocus (2010) puts it, the 'ultimate specimen,' is therefore a White, westernised, and (hyper)masculine one, with higher cultural values ascribed to them. As Han (2006) points out, White masculinity in the gay community is what every other form of masculinity is judged against. It becomes the absolute measure of masculinity and legitimacy. In Han's (2007) subsequent research, he argues that all non-White queer men's desirability is measured against the

standards of Whiteness. The process of 'othering,' moreover, is needed for Whiteness to legitimise itself as the unquestionable norm. This involves drawing distinctions, border-making, as well as producing sexual and racial stereotypes of the 'Other' to solidify the power of hegemonic White gay masculinity. For instance, the stereotypes of gay Asian men as feminine ladyboys or Geisha-type figures (Han, 2006) and the embodiment of Black gay men as hypermasculinised sexual deviants (Persson & Newman, 2008) function to uphold desirability standards that they themselves do not fulfil. By removing or reducing the masculinity that is valued by the gay community (which is also a product of Whiteness), these racialised sexual identities are subsequently devalued and become less desirable. The process of 'othering' within the gay community in order to distinguish particular citizens as sexually valuable corresponds to Puar and Rai's argument about cultural othering and border-making when it comes to deciding who is a legitimate sexual citizen (Puar, 2007; Puar & Rai, 2002).

This brings us back to the original argument that I proposed earlier, namely that the community's view of what a legitimate sexual citizen should look like is entangled with unspoken criteria of desirability, ethnicity as well as masculinity. Just like the assumption that everyone in the gay community shares an identical desire because of their sexuality, the assumption that everyone is a legitimate sexual citizen because of their state-recognised legal status falls short of addressing the real issue, which is that gay migrants need the recognition of their community before they can operate like every other legitimate sexual citizen who is able to practice their rights. In this instance, having equal rights does not always translate to enjoying the same rights as others.

Although it can be difficult for gay Asian migrants to obtain legitimacy due to complex power hierarchies in the gay community, my subsequent arguments illustrate how gay mobile dating applications could prove useful for gay Asian migrants to challenge these unspoken desires and power structures. Furthermore, the data I have gathered demonstrate how the westernised ideal of a legitimate sexual citizen can be subverted, reinvented, and challenged by using these applications. However, we should recognise that these applications are not flawless; in some ways, they are also used by the 'mainstream' gay community as a policing device that maintains existing power hierarchies.

1.4. Acknowledging diverse gay sexuality: The changing frameworks

While changes in the technology market (e.g. the emergence of dating apps that are aimed at a non-western gay male market) reveal the flourishing of different ways of practicing gay sexuality and identity across various locations and cultures, a different way to approach and study non-western gay sexuality is also taking place in academia. Sexuality and diasporic studies scholars question the validity of using a western academic framework to study non-western sexuality (Cruz-Malave & Manalansan, 2002; Grewal & Kaplan, 1994, 2001; Han, 2008b; Manalansan, 1995, 2003, 2006). This framework is often grounded in colonial discourse that undermines the agency of the colonial subject (Berry, 2001; Berry, Martin, & Yue, 2003; Boonmongkon et al., 2013; Cruz-Malave & Manalansan, 2002; Grewal & Kaplan, 1994, 2001; Han, 2008b; Manalansan, 1995, 2003, 2006). Within this framework, colonial discourse suggests a simplistic binary perception of the world, whereby the world is divided between primitivism and modernism, which leads to a narrow 'the west and the rest' type of argument (Grewal & Kaplan, 2001; Shohat & Stam, 1994). Within this colonial vision of the world, western societies are configured as the propellers of modernity and a site of progressive social movements, while the rest of the world is typified as traditional and oppressive environments, particularly in regard to sexuality (Grewal & Kaplan, 2001). The agency of the colonial subject is often undermined by the ideologically constructed westernised framework where they are unable to achieve freedom and equality due to the repressive circumstances. In other words, western modern sexuality is something that the rest of the world should copy and learn from, regardless of its validity or applicability. Furthermore, colonial discourse privileges certain acts of agency that can only be achieved in western societies due to the more liberal settings, such as same-sex marriage and the act of 'coming-out' by LGBT individuals (Grewal and Kaplan, 2001). For those societies that cannot achieve similar circumstances due to their political climate, they are automatically rendered as repressed, ignoring the localised and unique ways of expressing sexuality along the way (Manalansan, 2002). Within this narrative, migrants are assumed to be fleeing from an oppressive regime in their homeland. They are seen as moving from repression to freedom, from a rural and backward place to the modern metropolis, "where they can express their true nature as sexual identity in a state of freedom" (Grewal & Kaplan, 2001, p. 670).

Due to different experiences, and the failure of this so-called 'queer globalisation' to capture other forms of non-western sexuality, new studies of queer, non-normative sexuality in non-western countries have been established, also known as new queer studies (Cruz-Malave & Manalansan, 2002; Eng, Halberstam, & Muñoz, 2005; Kong, 2009; Manalansan, 2003). This approach aims to produce scholarship that provides a more

"nuanced understanding of the traffic and travel of competing systems of desire in a transnational frame […] and of how colonial structures of knowing and seeing remain in place within a discourse of an 'international' lesbian and gay movement" (Gopinath, 1998, p. 117). Similar to Gopinath's argument, Massad (2008) points out that the celebration of an 'international' and 'universal' sexual democracy both inside and outside of academic research (such as the act of coming out) is underpinned by western values and assumptions; he argues that this is a new form of sexual imperialism, one based on a universalised sexual epistemology that hardly fits into non-western sexual cultures. For instance, the freedom of LGBT individuals is often connected to the notion of 'coming out', whereby in order to achieve freedom, an LGBT person must 'come out' to the world and seek acceptance. This move of LGBT individuals coming out to the world is seen as progressive and is consistent with the narrative of a modern but westernised sexual identity that is presumed to be practiced by LGBT individuals across the world. This common understanding of a westernised gay identity and sexuality reiterates 'coming out' as a ritual of acceptance that needs to be performed by an LGBT individual to be seen as a fully-fledged, accepted member of the imagined global gay community. The ritual often consists of "coming out of the blood family and joining the other, alternative communities, which often contradicts the inseparable relationship between gay Asian men and their family and kinship network" (Berry, 2001, p. 211– 213). Although this symbolic and westernised notion of 'coming out' is a signifier of "liberation and a political act of resistance against the supremacy of heterosexual domination" (Kong, 2009, p. 106), it also raises the question as to whether this type of freedom is relevant to and consistently pursued by all gay men across different cultures.

In addition to that, two other approaches have also been established to study transnational sexuality in non-western contexts. The first is known as new Asian queer studies (Eng, 2001; Eng & Hom, 1998; Leong, 1995; Manalansan, 2003; Wilson, 2006), which branched out from American queer diasporic studies; the second one is known as critical regional Asian queer studies (Johnson, Jackson, & Herdt, 2000; Kong, 2009; Wilson, 2006). While the former approach studies queer diasporic experience in western societies, the latter approach attempts to understand the complexity of queer experience mainly in non-western countries and societies. These approaches are direct results of skepticism toward traditional Western academic approaches to queer and sexuality discourses, which it is increasingly clear do not accurately or adequately reflect the lived experiences of gay Asian men. These frameworks are crucial to my research, since the study of gay Asian migrants involves examining their lived experience in both western (host country) and non-western (homeland) contexts.

1.5. Assimilation and Integration

Having considered how traditional academic frameworks have shifted over the years to accommodate alternative sexualities and practices, I am also aware of the need to reevaluate traditional migration narratives. Traditional assumptions that migrants settle in their host countries either by assimilating or integrating (Alba & Nee, 2003; Bartram, Poros, & Monforte, 2014; Srole & Warner, 1945) are too limited. Assimilation refers to migrants foregoing their cultural practices and identity, and completely blending into their host country's culture (Alba & Nee, 2003). For instance, they stop using their native language and adopt the way of life of their host country without incorporating any of their own cultural identity and practices. As for integration, migrants adopt the way of life of their host country, but they do so by integrating their own cultural practices and identity into those of their host country (Alba & Nee, 2003). For instance, they may establish vernacular schools to maintain native language proficiency, or practice traditional customs passed down from previous generations. Understanding migration in there terms, however, is situated within an 'either/or' binary that leaves no room for negotiation. Furthermore, this traditional conception of migration has yet to incorporate and acknowledge the impact of digital technology and its ability to renegotiate identity and nationalism, as well as its power to connect different spatialities and in turn allowing people to maintain ties in different localities.

The traditional understanding of migration is further troubled by the fact that "citizenship and alien status are marked by racialised, classed, sexualised and gendered images of specific migrant groups" (Manalansan, 2006, p. 244). Migrants from non-White ethnic backgrounds will always be marked as different, and these visible differences often result in migrants being unable to be incorporated into the idea of nationhood and the notion of a full citizenship (Manalansan, 2006). Since gay Asian migrants in New Zealand are marked by their racial identity as non-White in a predominantly White and Anglo-Saxon society, it sabotages their ability to assimilate or integrate fully (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). Although the integration theory provides a less pessimistic outlook for gay Asian migrants because of the increasing acceptance of multiculturalism in various countries, it is naïve to assume that multiculturalism is fully embraced even in those countries that espouse it politically, as illustrated by the recent unrest in Europe regarding foreign migration. In addition to that, contemporary migrants often preserve consistent cultural and physical ties with their homeland (Carrillo, 2004).

The current migration pattern is consistent with Appadurai's (2001) view of global migration, in which he argues that "diaspora is the order of things" in the era of globalisation (p. 424). The formation of these pockets of diasporic communities is a consequence of migrants moving transnationally between countries while

simultaneously maintaining their loyalty to the countries that they travel to and originated from (Appadurai, 2001). Since migrants are maintaining their transnational ties with their homeland, it both one-sided and western-centric to assume that they assimilate or integrate completely by cutting off ties with their homeland. On top of maintaining transnational ties with their homeland, sexual migrants also carry with them "ideologies, practices, desires, longings, and imaginings about ways of enacting sexuality differently in a faraway location" (Carrillo, 2004, p. 68). This has proven that sexual migrants do not just passively accept dominant sexual ideologies in their respective host countries (which would be a form of assimilation); in addition, they carry with them the sexual ideologies and identity that they were brought up with in their homeland and adapt these where possible in their host countries (integration). This indicates that assimilation and integration processes can happen simultaneously, instead of the 'either/or' option. Thus, the binary model of assimilation and integration is unable to capture the many ways in which gay Asian migrants appropriate, recreate, challenge and change the concepts of nationhood and citizenship.

1.6. Hybrid space, freedom, and identity performance

Even though the legitimate sexual citizen is often thought to be a White one, the constant transnational movement of people in and out of specific locations contests the notion of what legitimate sexual citizenship can look like. As migration becomes common and widespread, individuals are less often restricted by regional boundaries, as it is easier to travel and migrate to other places. However, they are not just floating nomads who are unaware of their sense of identity and belonging (Cruz-Malave & Manalansan, 2002; Manalansan, 2003). Instead, migrants are actively seeking to build a sense of belonging and establish their identities across multiple locations by using different strategies (in this instance, locating their sexual identity via dating applications). As a result, location-specific sexual citizenship is continually being redefined, revamped, and reconstructed by pragmatic migrants in their quest to find a sense of belonging.

The subversion of a western-centric notion of legitimate sexual citizenship by gay Asian migrants is a two-fold process, enabled and powered by gay mobile dating applications. Firstly, these applications help to create a hybrid/discursive space (Berlant & Warner, 1998; Brickell, 2008; e Silva, 2006; Mowlabocus, 2010) for gay Asian migrant users to 'cross over' into, promising them a space where they will be free to express their sexuality and identity. My research interests are not limited to just the space that these applications create, but also focus on how gay men 'cross' into these spaces, and what allows them to do so. These applications are not only transforming and creating spaces for gay men to encounter one another; they are also crucial tools for

their users to 'cross' into such spaces. Gay mobile dating applications are arguably the means by which gay men can cross into these spaces, reconfiguring physical spaces through virtual contacts to create a zone of sexual freedom. This hybrid/discursive space is a "mobile space, created by the constant movement of users who carry portable devices that are continuously connected to the Internet and to other users" (de Silva, 2006, p. 262). This space is "fragile, maintained through precarious networks that come into being only to melt away and [be] re-formed in different places, through different nodes"(Mowlabocus, 2010, p. 194).   This fragile yet malleable space is evident through the global yet ephemeral connection that these applications offer, in which sporadic connections across the globe appear and disappear depending on who is in the vicinity. Additionally, this hybrid space also transforms the isolated environment around the applications' users into "spaces and places that gay men could move through in which they encounter one another" (Mowlabocus, 2010, p. 184)

Secondly, within this hybrid/discursive space gay Asian migrant users are able to represent themselves, and to perform strategically to gain acceptance and recognition. Performance in this context is not so much about acting; it is about adapting, changing, appropriating, and negotiating situations that might not be ideal or even hostile towards gay Asian migrants (Manalansan, 2003). Performance is an important way to gain sexual and cultural citizenship, as "citizenship requires more than the assumption of rights and duties; more importantly, it also requires the performance and contestation of the behaviour, ideas, and images of the proper citizen" (Manalansan, 2003, p. 14). The increasing numbers of gay Asian migrants within the community also questions the legitimacy of a sexual citizenship that mostly consists of White, middle class, and hypermasculinised men, highlighting the need to acknowledge and include the different demographics within the community. Moreover, by introducing an alternative way of performing sexuality into the local scene other than the hegemonic and westernised modes of gay sexual identity, gay Asian migrants create a space where their sexuality can be celebrated and accepted. Although racial hierarchies and oppression is nothing new within New Zealand's Eurocentric gay community, gay Asian migrants have been claiming the agency to act upon the oppressions and alienation that trouble them by matching their performance to the situation and the people (Manalansan, 2003), such as by learning the code of conduct that is accepted by the gay community and performing accordingly. Similar to Goffman's dramaturgical notion of the self (Goffman, 1959), gay Asian migrants are social actors who take on different roles in different contexts, and they cannot be understood as unified and monolithic. Gay Asian migrants do perform appropriately, albeit unwillingly sometimes, to fit into this idealised and expected notion of the proper citizen. The performative nature of sexual citizenship denotes a flexibility in which a legitimate sexual citizenship can be self-made. Citizenship is "neither a birthright nor is it about the romance of dissidence and resistance, but is about struggling to create scripts that will enable them

(migrants) to survive" (Manalansan, 2003, p. 142). Thus, gay Asian men's survival as sexual migrants in a foreign landscape is dependent on their ability to strategically demand acceptance as a legitimate member of the group (Manalansan, 2003).

1.7. Displacement and connections

Migration inevitably produces displacement of and in its subjects, and this movement between contrasting and diverse cultural and ideological situations becomes an inevitable part of migrants' experiences and identities (Shohat & Stam, 1994). Gay mobile dating applications potentially reduce this feeling of displacement by enabling users to navigate their way through foreign landscapes via the application and to connect with other gay men in the vicinity. The feeling of alienation and being 'out of place' is common across the life narrative of gay individuals (Knopp, 2004; Mowlabocus, 2010). This is due to gay individuals "rarely experience(ing) community as either naturally occurring or something which they are implicitly a part of, [because] fixed notions of community often rely on patterns of heterosexual kinship and family" (Mowlabocus, 2010, p. 8). In light of this, gay mobile dating applications are used as a tool by all users who share a similar sexual identity and practices to establish a sense of community and find solidarity. For gay Asian migrants, however, traveling between countries back and forth, moving through different cultural and social systems and ideologies, often renders them as outsiders. They become the 'half cast' of each of these societies, where they often find it difficult to be reimagined and incorporated into the idea of a complete citizenship (Cruz-Malave & Manalansan, 2002; Manalansan, 2003, 2006).

Nonetheless, this seemingly powerful ability of the apps to assist their users to connect to others and to form alternative communities can also be problematic. Although it can be assumed that an imagined gay community exists on these apps through which gay Asian migrant users can establish connections and seek refuge, asymmetrical power hierarchies which marginalise non-western gay men are often evident (Caluya, 2006, 2008; Han, 2006, 2007, 2008b; Jackson & Sullivan, 1999; Riggs, 2013). The unbalanced power distribution in the gay community results in the alienation of gay Asian migrants, who are often placed at the bottom of the 'desire hierarchy'. They are explicitly excluded due to their ethnicities and ways of performing their sexuality, and their status as immigrants hardly fits into the accepted and desirable gay identities that are long-established within the western-centric gay community. For instance, non-western users of these gay mobile dating applications are concerned with the pervasive racism on these platforms, and various gay media sources echo these concerns through headlines such as 'Is discrimination on Grindr killing gay sex'

(Rodriguez, 2014), 'Open Letter to Grindr Users: I Am Not Rice, He Is Not Curry' (Woo, 2013), and 'No Fats or Fems' (Cooper, 2012). From the use of racialised language on individual profiles such as 'no Asian and no Indian', down to the limiting interface design where 'Asian' is the only ethnic option in the profile menu for users from diverse ethnic backgrounds in Asia, it becomes apparent that exclusions are evident on these platforms. Although it is possible for gay Asian migrants to still connect to others on these apps, it certainly makes it more difficult for them to establish a sense of belonging in comparison to gay European migrants. My subsequent arguments will attempt to locate the origins of these issues, and highlight the contradictory nature of these applications as being both the problem and the remedy.

1.8. Gay traffic: Redefining legitimate sexual citizenship

Gay mobile dating applications rely on global networks to connect users with others even when they are frequently on the move. These applications constitute a constant flow of 'gay traffic' across the globe that destabilises what constitutes legitimate sexual citizenship. This phenomenon of 'gay traffic' leads to a "crisis of citizenship" (Castles & Davidson, 2000; Manalansan, 2003), as "place, identity, and belonging can no longer be regarded as logically connected in the midst of globalising tendencies" (Manalansan, 2003, p. 13). The constant traveling and movement within these 'hubs' (through which users from different origins flow in and out) challenge legitimate sexual citizenship within a specific location, since there is no longer a standard way of assessing the legitimacy of a particular sexual citizen.

The particular phenomenon of 'gay traffic' is part of the globalisation process, and globalised technologies like gay mobile dating applications play a significant role in producing such traffic. The growing significance of global information technologies such as the Internet and mobile applications "showcase[s] the influence [they have] on people's imagination about the rest of the world beyond their immediate locality, thus expanding the terms of their longings and desires" (Manalansan, 2006, p. 244). As these technologies introduce different sexual choices and practices in various locations, individuals can pursue a range of sexual options and can seek alternatives beyond their locality. Since the pursuit of sexual desires is no longer restricted to a certain locality, globalised gay mobile dating applications offer users a 'hybrid space' wherever they are, thus becoming 'hubs' where their imagination, longings, and desires for different sexual practices are displayed, learned, and lived through.

Globalisation also intensifies the flow of migration, as the advancement of communication technology and transportation have enabled information, commodities, and people to flow freely and quickly between places (Dennis Altman, 2004; Appadurai, 2001; Kunczik, 2002; Trouillot, 2001). Moreover, people can travel to and settle in different locations other than their homeland much more easily than before because of these advancements. Marshall McLuhan (1962) once coined the term "global village" to illustrate the effects of globalisation, where he argued that the world is becoming amalgamated into one single space and is no longer differentiated based on regions or countries. However, this "intensification of global connectedness" (Inda & Rosaldo, 2007, p. 2) also creates further complexities and conflicts among and within nations and societies across the world. Against the simplistic notion that globalisation offers the "end of geography" (Dennis Altman, 2001, p. 15), Altman argues that most of us are still operating within local spaces, and the tension between 'global' and 'local' can be felt in almost every aspect of our lives. Additionally, globalisation is an asymmetrical process that produces inequalities and exclusions (Ferguson, 2006; Kong, 2009; Massey, 1994; Trouillot, 2001), since it is "at once a matter of selectively dense interconnections and extensive disconnection and adjection" (Inda & Rosaldo, 2007, p. 33). Taking on board the exclusion and inequalities that globalisation has reproduced, my research takes the expansion of the west for granted and approaches globalisation and its effects from the other angle: namely, how traffic from the rest of the world flows to and affects the west (Inda & Rosaldo, 2007; Kong, 2009). This approach is inspired by what Appadurai coins the 'optics' of globalisation (Appadurai, 2001), and it generates questions such as "who gets to see globalisation and in what way? For whom and to whom does this vision of queer globalisation speak?" (Manalansan, 2003, p. 6). In other words, we need to rethink the validity of a globalised queer sexuality and its reception from the perspective of the 'recipients' of globalisation's effects.

1.9. Dating apps as cultural hub

Gay mobile dating applications serve as an important juncture for diverse sexualities to encounter one another, and facilitate dialogues across cultures and sexualities. The continual transnational traveling and border-crossing challenges the stagnant and dominant western-influenced gay culture and sexuality, as the hegemonic gay culture and practices are now caught in the process of constant appropriation, adaption and reinvention to accommodate the diverse flow of sexuality and practices. In other words, transnational migration (especially for sexual migrants that migrate because of their sexuality) enabled new forms of cultural exchange of sexuality and the plethora of ways of performing it in their host countries, due to migrants bringing in their understanding of sexuality that is pertinent to their locality (Carrillo, 2004). It also opens up the possibilities of

changing a western-centric understanding and approach to sexuality, by incorporating different ways to perform one's sexuality. The increasingly diversified understanding of gay sexuality also prompts us to contest the validity of a 'one size fits all', western gay identity that are found within these applications. These applications are globalised and introduced in many countries; people can use them whenever and wherever they are. By coming from various localities and moving across spaces, individuals inject different cultural practices and sexual ideologies of their own into these global applications, such as different ways to perform masculinities and sexuality that differs in different culture. The readily available and easily accessible applications allow gay subcultures from various locations to blossom on these mobile dating applications and illuminate the different practices of gay sexuality all over the globe. As a result, this could potentially subvert the current hegemonic, westernised understanding of gay male sexuality.

The 'one size fits all' concept of a globally recognised and standardised gay sexuality is highly pervasive. Most of the literature concerning LGBT sexual identity and politics is situated within the context of liberal western societies (Richardson, 2000). There is also a tendency to 'universalise' a common and standard LGBT sexual discourse across the globe, which is an act of colonising and westernising other LGBT identities and politics (Altman, 2001; Binnie, 2004; Richardson, 2000). For instance, the focus on same-sex marriage, the discourse of 'coming-out' to family and friends, and the increasingly popular position on same-sex couple adoption are universalised discourses that make it appear as if all LGBT individuals prioritise these themes regardless of locality and local politics. Issues such as the criminalisation of same-sex sexual behaviour and the failure to recognise cultural differences between LGBT communities around the world are often buried under this standardisation of LGBT issues important in the Western world. Since individuals practice their sexuality differently across cultures, the claim of a globalised and standardised gay identity needs to be reassessed.

Dennis Altman's (1996) pioneering argument for a globalised queer identity based on western understandings of LGBT identity and sexuality being accepted widely across the world is blind to its own limitations; he has failed to recognise the different ideological beliefs that non-western countries subscribe to, which often reject even the existence of homosexuality. Altman's optimistic perspective of a direct exportation and acceptance of the western model of homosexuality to and in Asian regions is highly problematic. The idea of gay identity, as practiced in western societies, to be 'replicated' across the world, regardless of localities assumes that other societies will take on the same priorities in terms of issues that are plaguing the western gay community, such as same sex marriage and adoption; moreover, it assumes other non-western gay communities will want to adopt westernised sexual labels, practices, and identity, such as 'gay' and 'lesbian'.

In a way, these gay mobile dating applications can be seen as a parallel to Altman's argument of a direct global exportation of western queer identity and culture. These applications can be considered as a means to export a hegemonic understanding of homosexuality to different locations, as they are globally accessible but constructed in a way to reflect western ideals of a desirable, acceptable gay identity and body image. Indeed, it may not be a stretch to say that these applications have been the purveyors and promoters of an idealised Western gay male identity. These idealised tropes and standards of what constitutes contemporary gay male identity permeate all levels of these applications, ranging from interface designs to users' interactions via the apps. Therefore, non-White members often find themselves in an unfavourable position, in which they are unable to subscribe to these unattainable ideals due to their ethnicity, social positions, and cultural background.

Puar (2007) similarly argues against the phenomenon of a global gay identity by pointing out the impossibility of having a globally accepted gay identity on the one hand and sensitivity to local resistance and regional differences on the other. Furthermore, we cannot ignore individuals' agency and the dynamic between local sites and global context, since these produce new hybridised identities and politics (Cruz & Manalansan, 2002).   In his later work, Altman (2001) readdresses the highly contested argument of a globalised queer identity, and points out that "homosexuality is far from being universally accepted or even tolerated" (p.92). Altman further argues that gay Asian men's experiences and identity construction are different to those of gay men in western culture. Nevertheless, Altman's arguments illustrate an urgent need for a revamping and rethinking of gay Asian subjectivity that current western academic frameworks of sexuality and identity are not able to capture convincingly. By looking at how gay Asian migrants are experiencing and attempting to reshape global sexual politics via gay mobile dating applications, this research unpacks the influences of a westernised understanding of gay male sexuality, and aims to understand gay Asian male sexuality from the perspective of gay Asian users themselves, instead of through westernised frameworks.

Although the hegemonic understanding of western gay sexuality and identity provides non-western users with a new way to perform their sexuality, it also restricts non-western gay men from being able to practice their interpretation of gay sexuality. The restriction is evident in the pressure on gay Asian men to accept the simplistic and limiting sexual roles that these apps offer, for example either being a 'bottom' or a 'top', or to embrace the rather static categories of western sexual identities, such as gay, bisexual or straight. Moreover, educational and community-building functions are absent in these applications as the applications' founders have yet to consider the different cultural needs of gay men across diverse cultures and systems. In cultures

that do not have any standard definition of what 'gay', 'bisexual' or 'straight' mean or in which the idea of same-sex desires is non-existent, these apps have certainly confronted gay Asian users with the dominant paradigms of western gay male culture. Gay Asian migrant users in turn are expected to conform to the specific expectations (behaviour, body image, coming out to family and friends) in order to participate in western gay male culture, which they often find difficult. However, as I will demonstrate in my argument, non-western users of these applications can also find ways to subvert these applications and technologies to meet their needs.

1.10. Every man for himself: Subverting global technologies

The invention of advanced online communication technologies has granted ample opportunities for gay men to explore different facets and possibilities of their sexuality. These could range from creating space-based options for gay men to meet and connect with others online (Beymer, 2012; Birnholtz, Fitzpatrick, Handel, & Brubaker, 2014; Blackwell, Birnholtz, & Abbott, 2014; Campbell, 2004; Gudelunas, 2012; Handel, Birnholtz, & Shklovski, 2014; Robinson, n.d.; Weiss & Samenow, 2010), to forging online and offline communities in order to build a sense of belonging (Soriano, 2014), to expressing their sexual identity in this relatively unrestricted virtual space (Stern, 2008). Of course, the other most prominent feature of these technologies is the accessible process of arranging sexual encounters and obtaining sexual gratification (Blackwell et al., 2014; Cassidy, 2013; Mowlabocus, 2010). This affects the way in which these technologies are being used, as local users adapt them for multiple purposes. In the Asian region, where non-normative sexuality is condemned both legally and culturally, the emergence of new covert communication technologies allows gay individuals to avoid moral policing and grants them spaces to express their alternative sexuality (Boonmongkon et al., 2013). Additionally, these technologies extend gay men's connection across various locations and helps them to understand different ways of performing gay sexuality in a different locality. For instance, a Grindr user might travel to Malaysia and find out that 'PLU' (People Like Us) is how Malaysians address other gay men in these applications; and in China, 'TongZhi' (which stands for comrade) is the going vocabulary for being gay. Although these different identifications are about homosexuality, they do not always equate to the hegemonic understanding of homosexuality produced under western ideology. Furthermore, the way that gay male sexuality is alluded to in different regional languages also underscores different performances and interpretations of gay sexuality. To use the Chinese term 'TongZhi' or 同志, as well as the Malaysian term 'PLU' as an example, these terms represent homosexuality as a collective identity, with a strong emphasis on

collective experience and struggle. This is vastly different to the individualised and independent performance of western gay sexuality.

As these globalised gay mobile dating applications are made available in different countries, their intended functions and individuals' experiences with them change according to location (Mowlabocus, 2010; Prestage, Bavinton, et al., 2015; Prestage, Brown, et al., 2015). For instance, since non-normative sexuality is widely practiced and accepted in most Western liberal countries, the use of gay mobile dating applications – as is the case in New Zealand – is mainly focused on pleasure-seeking. In Asia, however, these applications are used for slightly different purposes due to the region's cultural and legal restrictions. In Castenada's (2015) uses and gratification study of Filipino gay men and Grindr, he learned that Filipino gay men use Grindr to discover their sexuality and to build a sense of community. Although this is not the intended function of Grindr (as it mostly facilitates one-on-one sexual connections and individualised connections with other users), Castenada's research indicates that individuals do adapt these technologies to their situation and needs. While these mobile applications are founded upon the assumption that their primary users are self-identified as gay, this might not apply in countries where knowledge of and education about homosexuality are rare or forbidden, or where the concept of homosexuality does not exist culturally. As such, these applications become an excellent forum for users to discover their sexuality and seek out solidarity. This particular scenario also exposes a flaw which is consistent with the 'one size fits all' approach: these applications are founded and created within a very westernised understanding of homosexuality as an 'identity' accepted (however grudgingly) within a liberal setting. Subsequently, this leads to non-western gay men living in ultra-conservative environments having to subvert these technologies to use them more effectively and appropriately.

Simultaneously, the global expansion of these applications also forces technology companies to rethink their approach to different markets and cultural suitability. As mentioned before, the expansion of these applications to different regional markets allows different practices, identities and location-specific gay subcultures to emerge. Local users are also subverting these global applications for their purposes. This then forces companies to recognise the different ideals and understandings of homosexuality across different cultures and contexts to attract more potential users. For instance, in 2015, Chinese technology firm Beijing Kunlun Tech Co. offered 93 million USD in cash for 60 percent of Grindr's share (beijingscribe, n.d.). According to the statement made by Kunlun Tech Co.'s chairman, changes need be made to the leading mobile dating application in the market to serve the Chinese market more effectively. Even though the changes have not been made before Kunlun Tech Co are forced to re-sell Grindr due to the recent America and China trade war

in 2019, a quick comparison of Asian-created gay mobile dating applications (such as Blued) to the leading applications in the market reveals the differences and thus the potential changes. For instance, the current popular gay mobile dating applications on the market such as Grindr and Jack'd are mostly aimed at providing sexual gratification and limited social networking experiences, whereas Asian-created applications like Blued are focused on providing a community-building experience. Users of the Asian-created applications are free to create groups and upload daily updates of themselves to multiple forums, an affordance which is missing from both Grindr and Jack'd. These are some of the fundamental interface differences between the leading applications and Asian-created applications. Additionally, the rise of Asian-created gay mobile dating applications in China, such as Blued, also reflects the different gay ecology and needs in different parts of the world. This is due to the fact that most non-western gay communities are still struggling for equal rights and de-criminalisation, and thus apps like Blued are arguably a vessel for forming a collective gay identity according to the local political climate. For instance, Blued is fostering more community engagement by building in forums and group chat functions so that its members can communicate with each other collectively. In contrast, Grindr, for example, is focusing on one-to-one individualistic interactions, with few collective functions that foster community engagement (note: Grindr introduced a group chat function up to five members in 2018, after being bought by a Chinese company). In a way, Grindr's focus on individualistic interactions between users reflects the gay identity ingrained in the west, which has little need to build in additional functions for collective activism or discussion about the already established gay identity in western societies. The creation of these regionally specific gay mobile dating applications also exhibits the different practices and sexual identities that non-western gay men are invested in, prompting the question of the user-friendliness and cultural appropriateness of the current applications in the market.

1.11. Performing and representing in the 'critical arena'

Globalised gay mobile dating applications are not only helping to foster, reflect, and enhance diverse forms of transnational gay sexuality, but they also serve as a 'critical arena' for transnational gay Asian migrants to reinvent a hybridised gay identity and sexuality to gain cultural and sexual citizenship in New Zealand. These applications allow gay Asian migrants to perform their identity and sexuality in this discursive space, and it enables them to construct a different way to express their sexuality that is pertinent to their cultural background and identity.

Given that the acceptance of sexuality and identity expression are crucial to sexual migrants' decision to migrate in the first place, gaining sexual citizenship from their host countries becomes fundamental for them to be able to express their sexual identities without constraint. Since the meaning of what constitutes legitimate citizenship can be contested and subverted, gay mobile applications become the most efficient tool for gay Asian migrants to challenge the hegemonic sexual citizenship criteria. Through the process of active identity management and performance within these applications, gay Asian migrants can negotiate their membership and citizenship indirectly but effectively. I am suggesting that the self-representation of gay Asian migrants on these apps is never less than a discursive performance, and it can be strategically deployed to subvert hegemonic expectations of their social status.

Since ethnicity is a fixed factor that gay Asian migrants cannot opt out of, utilising their racial identity becomes part of the 'self-making' discursive strategy to gain entry into the racially exclusive gay scene. Gay Asian migrants are taking advantage of their racial differences as well as existing racial tropes/stereotypes to create a self-representation that is beneficial to them. Studies on gay communities in relation to racism have managed to identify the common stereotypes that result in gay Asian men being seen as less desirable (Callander et al., 2012; Glasser, Robnett, & Feliciano, 2009; Han, 2006, 2007, 2008a; Riggs, 2013). For instance, ethnographic research on Australia's gay community illuminates on how gay Asian men are stereotypically seen as effeminate, passive, and have smaller penises (Caluya, 2006; Han, 2006; Riggs, 2013). These depictions present gay Asian men as feminine and less of a man, thus undesirable in a hypermasculinised gay male culture (Riggs, 2013). The prevalent and common feminine stereotype of gay Asian men also helps to define what constitutes masculinity, which is the opposite of these mentioned qualities. Of course, these racial stereotypes existed even before the popularity of dating websites, and affect the ways in which the general gay population perceives non-White ethnic gay men as less desirable (Baird & Riggs, 2009; Caluya, 2006, 2008; Patton & Sánchez-Eppler, 2000; Fung, 2004; Glasser et al., 2009; Han, 2008b; Jackson & Sullivan, 1999). More specific racialised tropes include the 'moneyboy' who is seeking an older, usually White companion for financial support (Kong, 2009); the beautiful 'geisha' who is considered less masculine and more feminine (Han, 2006); the 'fresh off the boat' figure, who is highly orientalised, uncivilised and needing to be educated (Manalansan, 2003); and many more. These tropes are no doubt informed by skewed orientalist/colonialist discourses and desires. Moreover, various studies in this context tend to victimise the subjects and neglect their autonomy in the process of constructing these tropes. It is almost as if gay Asian men have no way to contest these tropes and stereotypes, but can only succumb to them. These over-simplistic approaches have left several important questions unanswered: what if these tropes are also part of

the desired identity that gay Asian migrants want to perform and portray themselves as? Does playing into these roles warrant detrimental results? Do gay Asian migrants always passively accept these positions without being critical of them? Or are there ways of actively playing with these characters in order to challenge racial stereotypes? The answer lies within the notion of 'performance', as demonstrated by Manalansan's (2003) research below.

In his ethnographic study of gay Filipino migrants in the United States, Manalansan (2003) observes a similar strategy among gay Asian migrants, according to which they perform a particular type of identity to secure sexual citizenship in a foreign land. Manalansan, for instance, draws attention to the 1991 Santacruzan pageant in New York, which originated from a Spanish Catholic pageant that is celebrated every May in the Philippines (Manalansan, 2003). The appropriation of this traditional, religious pageant (which normally only features female performers) by a New York fashion show/pageant featuring cross-dressing gay Filipino men changes the original meaning and context of the pageant back in the Philippines. Manalansan (2003) further asserts that altering the pageant subverts hegemonic ideas of nationhood and national identity, as it incorporates different displays of gay sexual identities into the narrative of American culture, recreating it in a format (beauty pageant, drag show) that can be readily accepted by mainstream American gay culture. The appropriation of various familiar gay American cultural traditions in the pageant is also the key to attracting wider mainstream gay audiences to participate in this event, which helps to introduce Asian gay culture to its intended audience. Thus, this event can be seen as a "style of reimagining a community […] [and] the performance can be regarded as an attempt by Filipino gay men to negotiate and present their collectivity to themselves and to others" (Manalansan, 2003, p. 151). Contrary to the perspective of trying to counter stereotypes by avoiding them at all cost, this mode of performance, in which gay Filipino migrants are actively portraying racial stereotypes of themselves (feminine cross-dressers) in a drag fashion show, is utilised to legitimise themselves as fully fledged sexual citizens in the local gay scene. Understanding that stigma cannot be undone nor be detached completely (Goffman, 1974), gay Asian migrants in this case are pragmatically and strategically inserting themselves into the narrative of the local gay community by turning racial stereotypes into points of recognition and unique identity markers.

The key to such a performance is the notion of play: gay Asian migrants play with the fluidity of their identity, which suggests a sense of agency and proactivity that counters the dominant narrative that they are passive victims of a racialised hierarchy. Instead, they are aware of the economy of desire within the scene; they know what the scene demands of them and they acknowledge the orientalised images impose on them.

Subsequently, these applications become the place where they can play with and ridicule such images/stereotypes. Through this process of play, gay Asian migrants are able to ""return the gaze", which is to reinvent themselves according to their own terms" (Manalansan, 2003, p. 151)

1.12. Summary

Gay mobile dating applications are not the problem-free utopia that their creators have envisioned and promised. These applications and their design are situated within a westernised system of homosexual practices. Furthermore, these applications reflect the dominant ideologies of the west and continue to ostracise non-western users. However, as I have argued throughout this chapter, the agency of non-western users such as gay Asian migrants cannot be ignored. I argue that gay Asian migrants are not passive victims and powerless refugees within the gay scene; instead, they are well aware of the exploitation and asymmetrical power hierarchy. Through pragmatism and strategic self-representation, they can incorporate themselves and their alternative ways of performing sexuality into the local gay scene, thus gaining sexual citizenship in the process.

The arguments that I have proposed in this chapter are an attempt to highlight the contradictory nature of these applications. On one hand, these applications are the purveyors and exporters of westernised gay identity and sexuality, but on the other hand the users that they are indirectly being ostracised (gay Asian migrants) can also subvert these applications for their benefit. Serving as a juncture/ hub that 'gay traffic' from different localities flows through, these applications contribute to the flourishing of different representations of sexuality from various cultures. Gay Asian migrants are also able to perform their sexuality in this discursive space, in which they can gain recognition and awareness from the local gay community. In addition, the constant transnational movement of gay Asian migrants between their homeland and host countries highlights the need to reevaluate the notion of citizenship, since it is increasingly difficult to pin an individual to a particular locality. It also exposes the vagueness of what constitutes a legitimate sexual citizen, since its meaning and criteria are not self-evident, but can be reconstructed and redefined accordingly.

These applications are changing rapidly as their users base continues to grow globally. Firstly, the rise of different applications created in non-western countries is changing the current market. Apps like Grindr, Jack'd, and Scruff were created and founded in the U.S., so it should not come as a surprise that the designs and features of these apps cater to western users. However, the creation and development of non-western gay

mobile dating applications such as Blued in China signify a change in the market's climate, as well as revealing the different needs of users across different localities. For instance, these applications recognise that non-western gay communities are using them not only for leisure and pleasure-seeking, but also for community and identity-building, due to local political climates that vilify homosexuality. The potential for Blued to develop into a globally recognised application like Grindr is foreseeable and this could have interesting consequences, such as whether gay white men will find it difficult to operate on these apps due to their tendency to reflect local culture, and whether the phenomenon of reverse racism could occur (where gay white men may be discriminated against due to being located in an entirely different hierarchy of desire).

Secondly, the public backlash against discrimination that occurs on these platforms is gaining momentum and has resulted in some rather intriguing situations. The embedded racial and desire hierarchies are constantly being exposed by its users, and they have been reported widely and regularly by mainstream gay media. Users are now well aware and critical of the economy of desire within these applications, and they are actively voicing their dissatisfaction with the fact that these apps allow racist remarks to be made on individual profiles. Users' dissatisfaction also gives rise to niche dating applications that cater to specific users. For instance, Scruff is a dating application that attracts gay men who prefer dating hairy gay men (who are often deemed unattractive on Grindr), and Jack'd has become an informal and preferred app for gay Asian men to find other Asian men.

Last but not least, these applications are slowly evolving from solely providing sexual gratification to a plethora of other functions, such as election campaigning and surveying (for instance, Hilary Clinton advertised her campaign on Grindr), product advertising (both Madonna and Lady Gaga have advertised album releases on Grindr) and even heterosexual women seeking a 'gay best friend' on Grindr (Mic, 2016). These unintended functions of gay mobile dating applications illustrate that they are always changing and adapting to different needs and responding to their consumers. It becomes important to think about whether these applications will start responding to the inequality they have indirectly contributed to, and whether they might devise and adopt new approaches to accommodate diverse sexuality and ethnicity.

The changing facets of these applications are inevitable as they have shifted to accommodate various market demands and requests over the years. These changes are happening, too, because users are becoming more sophisticated and more demanding of what these applications can do aside from dating and hooking up with others. However, these changes hardly deal with the core issues that these applications are creating. My next

few chapters are organised to examine the issues that are concealed behind these changes. Firstly, racism remains unresolved in these applications. Many users are still accusing each other of being racist and exclusionary. However, the real issue is the way in which the platform itself, through interface design, is indirectly contributing to racism and racist behaviours, which needs to be examined further. Secondly, the creation of niche gay dating apps that aim to attract the less conventional body types and ethnic groups is only a cosmetic solution. Acceptance on niche apps does not include their users in the mainstream gay narrative; rather, these users are being pushed into a separate sphere that is still alienating them. Lastly, the accelerating commercialisation of these apps has become a crucial factor that could decide whether gay Asian migrants are elevated within the desire hierarchy or not. The deciding factor lies in the fact that if gay Asian migrants have significant purchasing power and, as such, could be recognised as valuable users within the capitalist market, then this could potentially change their status within the community.

Chapter Two

The creation of a homotopia…with a catch

This chapter investigates the seemingly neutral interface and designs of gay mobile dating applications, suggesting that they are far from neutral, and are in fact reflective of the ideological stance of the applications' creators. Studies of the interface have always been crucial to understanding how a piece of digital technology works. As the gateway that connects us to the technological artefact, we communicate our expressions, identities, and thoughts through the interface. While the interface represents the 'surface' of the technology, it nonetheless serves an extremely important function: it facilitates communication with the technology and, in the case of communication platforms, with the other users using the same technology. As such, it is important to examine how these interfaces and their designs shape our communication and expression in these technological spaces. This chapter outlines some useful specific methods for approaching the interface design and subsequently the (self)representation of users within these designs. These frameworks also subsequently inform my research methodology in the introduction chapter.

The first framework is Bogost's (2007) theory of procedural rhetoric. Bogost's theoretical framework is crucial for further unpacking the not-so-innocent or neutral creation of a computational process. As Bogost points out in his work, the computational process is not free of ideology, but creates positions and arguments that must be teased out to understand the underlying ideology. The second framework, known as the Walkthrough method (Light et al., 2016), is very valuable for studying the discursive and ideological frameworks that inform the design of these apps. This framework is useful as it allows the researcher to examine the interface in relation to the cultural influences that shaped these mechanisms that are found in apps, and subsequently how this then informs the users' experience and guide them throughout their usage. This framework also complements Bogost's framework of procedural rhetoric, as it adds cultural aspects to understand how computational rhetoric is often guided by cultural inferences and ideological positions, instead of being just a neutral technological process.

The popularity of the three apps studied in this thesis (Grindr, Jack'd, and Blued) is mainly due to their ability to transform their users' surroundings into an ever-changing homotopia, one that is constantly on call through the interface affordances. These apps make often hidden gay individuals visible to each other, which suddenly places their users into environments populated with gay men that share similar desires, and are available

through these apps to connect with others to live out their desires. These apps are also highly popular because of the ongoing rhetoric of promoting freedom and choice, a rhetoric that is mostly unquestioned by their users. But the interface designs of these apps give only an illusion of choice and freedom, namely, the freedom to choose who you want to be by selecting from a range of restrictive options. This 'freedom' is highlighted to the users by the choices offered when setting up their profile, such as choosing their hookups, as well as how they want to communicate with others. All these features seem like a potentially liberating experience for the users, but when the interface designs are studied closely, it becomes distinctively clear that these 'free' choices are not without boundaries. In their study of Tinder's interface design, one of the most popular 'mainstream' dating apps in the market, David and Cambre (2016) assert that while most users "assume a degree of autonomy and freedom in their communication, the micro -layers of control informing features and interfaces are always already guiding the user to conform to some kind of pre-existing or pre-designed form of relationality" (p. 5). Furthermore, the logic of choice, heavily influenced by neoliberal thinking, is often affected by wider cultural influences. In other words, the community reflects cultural norms about what is deemed desirable and acceptable, thus affecting what we end up choosing to be.

This chapter examines this rhetoric of choice offered by the interface designs of these apps. I will argue that this logic of choice is highly manipulative and opaque, whereby the interface works more as a means of restraint than of genuine choice. Furthermore, the rhetoric of choice places the onus on the user, which means that those who find that the choices are not applicable to them implicitly have only themselves to blame, since the apps assume everyone has fair access and opportunity to exercise their selection and freedom. By holding users responsible for exercising their own selection, these apps often "affirm neoliberal logics of individualisation and choice, echoing the recent subsumption of gay liberation rhetoric into the homonormative ideology of rights" (Aunspach, 2015, p. 41).Such ideological underpinnings, I will argue, have left gay Asian migrant users struggling to find a valid form of freedom and choice under standards that seem primarily to benefit users of White/European descent. Given the guise of a universal interface applicable across different localities, it might be timely for us to ask whether the choices offered by these apps are truly universal and globalised. Furthermore, is this freedom of choice equally accessible across all users of diverse ethnic backgrounds and cultures? I argue that the interfaces of these apps are pre-selecting a particular range of choices for their users, choices which can be highly detrimental to gay Asian migrant users who struggle to fit into this particular range of representation.

To spell out the logic of my chapter more clearly, the interface designs of these applications are forging a very specific and narrow version of a homotopia influenced by wider gay culture. These apps should be studied in the context of gay male culture, as they are built not only for that, but they are also built on that. In other words, these apps are designed in specific ways to appeal to gay communities by mirroring them, becoming an extension of the existing gay community. Key studies on the racial tensions that have plagued most internet dating websites (Han, 2006, 2007, 2008; Callander et al., 2012, 2015; Birnholtz, 2014; Caluya, 2006; Riggs, 2013) conclude that racial tensions do exist and these spaces amplify such tensions, reflecting a wider cultural consensus on the issue of race relations. Racial discrimination in these gay digital spaces comes as no surprise since various forms of discrimination plague the 'gay community', with racism being one of the most prominent forms of discrimination in the community. However, what these studies have yet to examine is how these digital interfaces are contributing, perhaps indirectly, to a hostile and racist culture carried forward to the current dating apps scenarios. As Aunspach (2015) suggests in his study of Grindr, the app "is a site of (re)production, providing homonormative interpellation for identification through performances that fit or 'make sense' because, in their enactment, they conform to and affirm an original script for queer behaviour and identity" (p. 27). In other words, the continuous logging into these spaces socialises the users into a particular vision of what homosexuality should be. Moreover, this practice of logging in and out of these apps creates an identity that will eventually become 'normal' and 'natural' to users, while it also becomes increasingly hard for them to notice or to question the constructedness of these spaces and identities.

Aunspach's observation is certainly valid; however, he has yet to examine just what exactly are the 'tools' that normalise certain performances of homosexuality in these spaces. I would extend his argument and argue that it is the interface of these applications that legitimises specific types of homosexuality and de-legitimise others that do not fit into the apps developers' vision of what homosexuality should be. Therefore, it can be argued that the interface designs of these apps are (de)legitimising a particular brand/vision of a homotopia, where gay Asian migrants are hardly taken into consideration and cannot easily be a part of this utopia. Under such conditions, certain bodies are preferred on these platforms, and some ethnicities are more desirable that others. Moreover, westernised hierarchies and standards of beauty are routinely enforced and policed in these digital spaces. Of course, as I have argued earlier, these apps are also a product of our current gay culture; therefore, they reflect the particular kind of homotopia imagined in a predominantly Anglo-Saxon country/society such as New Zealand. One might ask, how do these apps implement their vision of a homotopia? In arguing that this occurs in large part through their interface designs, I will focus in particular on the function of visual display as well as embedded filtering mechanisms.

2.1. Creation of technology: By the mainstream, for the mainstream

Technology giants and creators, such as the founders of Apple and Samsung, often speak of their work in terms of creating visions of the future. These visions inform the design of the technologies, as well as moulding the platform where their users can interact with each other. Less overtly, these visions of the creators are nevertheless influenced by their social position, idealism, and ideological stances. Thus, no creation of technologies is ever neutral or free of agenda; they are loaded with the creators' vision of what the technology should be and should do. For instance, one of the main visions of Grindr is to facilitate hookups between men using GPS technology, and its interface design as well as its structure highlight the sexual nature of the app (such as the display of carnality, as will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Three). It also fosters a particular ideological position, namely the celebration of gay men's sexual freedom. Light et al. (2016) recognise a similar logic, suggesting that "an app's vision involves its purpose, target user base and scenarios of use, which are often communicated through the app provider's organisational materials" (p. 9). They extend their observations to claim that "an app's vision tells a user what it is supposed to do and, by extension, implies how it can be used and by whom" (p. 9). While acknowledging possibilities for subversion by the users, they further argue that the "understanding [of] the app's original vision provides a baseline for identifying user appropriation" (p. 9). In other words, user subversion can only happen when users understand the nature of the apps. As such, the users are still confined to acts of subversion that can only happen within boundaries established by the vision of the creators. To expand this argument further, I argue that subversion does happen, but it is still within the framework that the app's creator has imposed. For instance, the 'block' function in these apps is intended for user to stop all communication from someone that is harassing them (as stated across all three apps' websites where they explain the features on the platforms); however, it has become a cultural practice where users simply just use such function to 'block' people that they are not interested in, with or without any harassment. Subsequently, when we examine the nature of these three apps (which is to forge a homotopia for their users), then it is no surprise that the 'block' function is being subverted by users who wants to enhance their personal homotopia further. Similarly, Pfaffenberger (1992) has identified that "technologies serve the cultural aspirations of their creators, who often accrue power by oppressing particular groups" (p. 7). His argument resonates with Nakamura's (2000) point that new technologies are created and developed mostly by a powerful group for that powerful group. In this particular context, my argument echoes this view by emphasising how these apps are created according to westernised standards, which have colonising effects through the apps' universalising of those standards.

Figure 2.1: An example of Blued's official image of the app that features two Caucasian men.

The three apps that this research have examined are designed primarily for the western mainstream users, and they neglect the different needs of other users from a non-western upbringing. In relation to the dating function, these applications are mostly designed to attract a western, White, and middle-class audience, as is evident from the press kits that illustrate the 'imagined' audience they will attract. They are also the default users that the apps are targeting. The kits mostly feature White and fit men (see Figure 2.1 and 2.2; even in Blued's press kit, despite the major users of the apps are of Asian descent), with one or two tokenistic and presumably mixed race/black men (see Figure 2.2); Asian men hardly feature in these press kits). Such a specific vision of their imagined users results in those outside of their targeted demographic being denied visibility, in favour of the so called 'universality'.
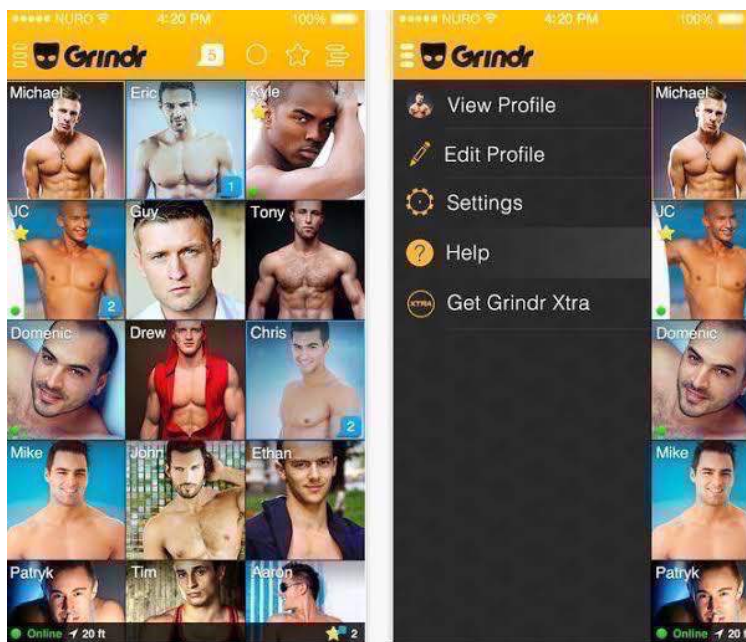
Figure 2.2: An example of Grindr's press kit that features almost all gay White men.

Kolko (2000) argues that most of the digital interfaces favour 'raceless' design, meaning that the interface designs are 'neutral' or 'universal' in their construction, or at least appear to be. But this is only possible with Whiteness set as a default, whereby Whiteness becomes synonymous with 'erasing' racial features. How do we eliminate the element of race, however, when ethnicities play a crucial part in the construction of users' online identity in the digital space? Moreover, how do we make sense of these apps' efforts to push for ethnic self-identification instead of going 'raceless'? In many ways, these apps are increasingly highlighting individual differences (especially ethnicity) rather than staying neutral in their designs. Moreover, these apps also highlights ethnicity as a 'mode of consumption', whereby users can 'shop' for their desired gay ethnic men easily by implementing feature such

as ethnic filters. In addition to that, gay ethnic men also have to choose from a rather generalised list of ethnicities that best represent them, despite the lack of specificity and relevance to their ethnic and cultural background. Therefore, the digital spaces in which the gay community is invested, such as these applications, are anything but neutral, and they can go as far as making ethnicity into a construct far more visible (exemplifying the construction of race) than before. Furthermore, race in this context has become a commodity, currency, and social capital for both the proprietors and the users of these applications.

2.2. Procedural rhetoric and performance

Ian Bogost's notion of 'procedural rhetoric' is a crucial concept for expanding on the interface study that I am undertaking here. Although Bogost's study is on video games, I suggest that the socio-technological processes he describes are also applicable to the apps examined here. The core of Bogost's argument revolves around the way in which non-human processes and rules within a digital space (in his context, video games) define the 'laws' and 'regulations' of the space, which restricts its users to performing within an ideologically shaped environment. This rhetoric can be revealing in terms of the creators' vision and ideological position on certain issues.

Bogost (2007) defines procedural rhetoric as a "practice of using processes persuasively" (p. 3) on the part of the system itself. More specifically, "procedural rhetoric is the practice of persuading through processes in general and computational processes in particular" (p. 3). To Bogost (2007), "processes define the way things work: the methods, techniques, and logics that drive the operation of systems, from mechanical systems like engines to organisational systems like high schools to conceptual systems like religious faith" (p. 3). A similar logic applies to my study of the interface. The interface design of these apps is a computational process that works to produce a particular rhetoric arising from the procedures that users are persuaded to engage in. This process drives the day-to-day operation of these apps, whether by the users themselves or the management of the apps. This chapter focuses on the procedural rhetoric emerges from the interface designs of the apps themselves, and not just the 'rhetoric' deployed by users within these app (Users' rhetoric processes will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five). In short, interface design is a product of such a procedural rhetoric, designed and programmed to create a particular logic and flow within these apps. In the instance of these three apps, such procedural rhetoric is about creating a homotopia for their users. As procedural rhetoric serves to convey ideas and to entail persuasion, an interface design must inevitably affirm a particular position;

in this case, it affirms the position of a legitimate and desirable gay sexual identity, namely one based on western standards.

Bogost's study of procedural rhetoric is particularly useful when we think about the 'universality' of interface design of these apps and their claim to represent interests equally among a diverse range of users. Bogost's framework is crucial to unpack the illusion of users' agency with regard to the interface, as these interfaces are structured to produce specific goals and outcomes. This framework is a useful means for uncovering computational processes (such as creating, designing, coding and programming) that are not intrinsically neutral, but are rather reflections of the "authorship of rules and behaviour" (Bogost, 2007, p. 3) and its expected results. To apply Bogost's framework to my research, the intentions of these apps are to create a homotopia, as well as to generate a map of desires for their users. The computational processes then follow these intentions closely, producing interfaces and, more broadly, a procedural rhetoric that support this goal. For example, the map of desires are enabled by the location tracking technology which allows users to track down whoever that interests them; and the homotopia that is filled with gay men is achieved through creating an interface that is focused on displaying the users through a grid format that fills up the screen, creating the impression of a robust environment. In addition, the various filtering features (such as age, position, ethnicity filters) also reinforce a homotopia where one can only be surrounded by the people that they like.

My research has found evidence of such rhetoric/computational processes in these apps, frequently displayed in the form of rules and regulations located within its interface design, which also convey the ideological position of its creators, as I will discuss further in Chapter Three. In a way, these three apps echo Bogost's research as they enact a persuasive rhetoric through their processes (the UI), such as offering particular affordances for self-representation and communication, which is essential to fostering a particular vision of what a gay community or a legitimate homosexuality should be. Under these circumstances, the users must perform within the boundaries of these ideological walls, conforming to the logic that these apps' creators have envisioned within the rhetoric of their apps. For instance, this could range from what a user can or cannot do within the interface of these apps; the ways in which a user's picture is examined for its content before they can upload it; the fact that users have to choose from the pre-set identity markers such as sex positions and ethnicities without any room for deviations. The rhetoric is particularly important because, at the computational level of interface design, it shapes the practices and habits of the users. As users repeatedly log onto these apps for an average of eight times a day (Grindr LLC, 2013), this repetition itself becomes rhetorical, socialising the users into a particular position that these apps are pushing for. The users become an effect of

the computational processes themselves and their interactions become part of the procedural rhetoric which works at the level of the apps' system. Furthermore, by logging in and out of these apps repeatedly, users are made to feel that they are adopting and embodying a highly specific identity that will only function on these platforms and nowhere else. For instance, these three apps' interface designs perpetuate homonormativity that are prevalent in most gay communities located in western countries. This ranges from the definition of gay sexual identities that are commonly adopted in most western gay community, such as 'top, bottom, and versatile' in the users' selection of their identity in these apps (Grindr has a whole section on gay subcultural identities that the users can choose from, which is heavily rooted in western gay subcultural identities, such as 'twink', 'bears', 'jock' and so on). Furthermore, the ideas of how ethnicity is perceived from a westernised perspectives are illustrated by the rather simplified options of ethnic identities selection on these platforms that ignores intersectionality. Moreover, the default language of these apps in English is also a way in which homonormativity is built into the designs of these interfaces where the expression of sexuality is confined to dominant and western-specific lexicon. These features therefore restrict users to construct an identity/profile according to homonormative standards.

I am not in any way intending to suggest that these apps are designed to intentionally alienate and manipulate their users, but it is evident that they reflect particular worldview and ideologies, and it is through these perspectives that their users see the homotopian world. As Aunspach (2015) points out on his research into Grindr, "it orients, positions, deflects, and seduces users to view their world through its lens" (p.10). If someone wants to use these apps, he must abide by the apps' rules and be subjected to the apps' matchmaking procedures. This is not to say that individuals have no agency at all to subvert these rules and ideological positions, but the possibilities for subversion are limited by the computational design. Moreover, it is crucial to understand what are the procedural designs of these apps and how they set limits on what users can do, both technologically and ideologically, as well as how this has rhetorical effects for how they think about themselves.

2.3. The Walkthrough method

As an interface is hardly a neutral creation, it is important to recognise the wider systematic structures and influences that inform the designs. Light et.al introduced the 'walkthrough method' in 2016, proposing that such a method is a productive way to study the designs of apps informed by cultural and structural influences. Light et al. argue that, aside from studying just the app itself, the researcher should be aware of the wider cultural

influences that create the app, as well as how the app shapes the culture in turn (2016). The walkthrough method enriches the study of digital interfaces because it highlights the fact that the interface not only enables its users to perform certain functions, but also essentially creates the world within which the users live through their experiences (Kolko, 2000). The walkthrough method is useful for exposing the racial and sexual ideologies embedded in the applications that I am researching, and it also assists in comprehending how the design of an interface can influence users' behaviour and their interactions with others.

This method is particularly beneficial to aid my central argument in this chapter. I have encountered a rather complex theoretical situation when thinking about both culture and interface design. In a nutshell, situating the design within a cultural context forces us to ask whether what we see on these apps' interface is part of the wider culture, and if so, then whether the interface is a reflection of or an influence on a cultural reality. Moreover, how can we connect the design of these apps' interfaces to contemporary gay digital culture? The walkthrough method offers to show how both digital artefact and culture influence each other. In connection to this chapter, I will illustrate in Chapter Three on how Mowlabocus' (2010) theory on unique gay digital culture also sheds light on why we should not be surprised by the distinct interface design of these apps as they are heavily influenced by offline, and often historical, gay cultural practices.

In this particular method, Light et al. (2016) highlight three features of apps – vision, operating model, and governance – that we should take into consideration to understand how "an app's designers, developers, publishers, and owners expect users to receive and integrate it into their technology usage practice" (p.9). First, the vision of the creators is guided by the creators' social position and ideals. Such a vision, which is inevitably ideological, will create apps consistent with the creators' worldview and perspectives on a certain subject and situation. For example, Blued labels itself as a 'one world, one gay social app' (blued.com, n.d); Jack'd brands itself as the 'most diverse and authentic app'(jackd.com, n.d); Grindr, on the other hand, calls itself the 'the world's largest social networking app'(grindr.com, n.d). All three of these brands communicate a specific, differently universalising vision of what these apps are and what they can provide to their users' experience. Second, the operating model "involves its business strategy and revenue sources, which indicate underlying political and economic interests" (Light et al., 2016, p. 10). For instance, the revenue sources of these gay dating apps rely heavily on user subscription and advertisement. In addition, these apps often ask their users to provide more individual and private data of themselves which can be monetised by the apps developers by selling them to data mining company (Light et al., 2016). As Light et al. (2016) points out, an app's operating model and its interest can be found in documents such as its press kits, in-app purchases, the

price of the app and so on. For this research, the interface designs are also a good vantage point to see the underlying interests of an app as well. Third, the governance of an app "involves how the app provider seeks to manage and regulate user activity to sustain their operating model and fulfil their vision" (Light et al., 2016, p. 10). Similar to Bogost's study, they argue that "governance is reflected in the app's rules and guidelines, which place boundaries around the types of activity that users are able to conduct, and even the types of users allowed on an app" (Light et al., 2016, p.10). The governance of these apps is enacted through a twofold process: first, the implementation of regulations that directly shape users' expectation and action on these platforms, such as prohibiting explicit pictures, discriminatory language and so on; second, the apps and their interfaces create an environment where users can fulfil self-surveillance and self-regulation. This is most obvious with the filtration mechanism of these apps, as examined below.

2.4. The walkthrough: Homotopia through interface rhetoric

2.4.1 Filtering:

As other research has pointed out, men are more likely to experience sexual racism on these online platforms,

Figure 2.3: An example of Grinder's filter
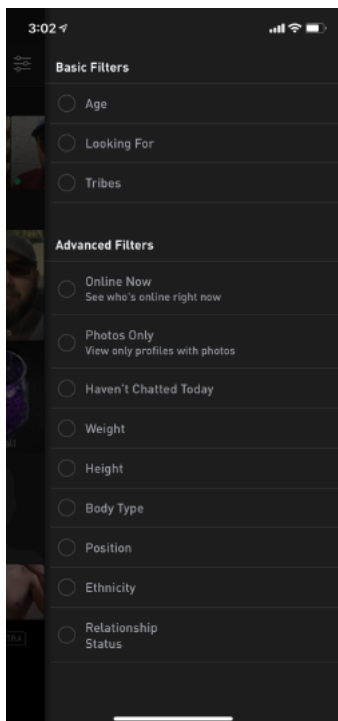
especially platforms that are focused on finding a relationship (Plummer, 2008; Smith, 2012; Callander et al., 2016). Callander et al.(2016) argue that this is because the "online environment can change what information people share and also the ways in which they share it [...], [and] how a perception of anonymity might influence behaviour" (p. 5). Furthermore, the Internet has created "new social spaces for men to engage more directly with their desires, develop and express their fantasies, and approach potential partners with these desires and fantasies in mind" (Callander et al., 2016, p. 5). While these observations are certainly

Figure 2.4: An example of Jack'd's filter

applicable and reasonable, these studies have yet to examine the tools (namely, the UI) that affected the "new social spaces" as well as how users

have been able to manage their desires and fantasies in this environment. The filtration mechanism of these apps is one crucial tool for their users to manage and to express their desires and fantasies.

All three apps feature very similar filtering functions that allow users to filter out certain profiles based on the criteria that they have provided (see Figure 2.3 to 2.5). These filters are usually based on age, ethnicity, distance, online presence and more. This function is supposed to allow users to find who they want to connect with more quickly. Furthermore, users can also pay to have more filters made available to them, which allows for further filtration (across these three apps, both Grindr and Jack'd wants users to pay for more advanced filter - see Figure 2.3 for example). This will tie into my second point below, where these apps often feature an overwhelming number of users and the developers have made it clear to users that these filters are a necessity to them if they want to be able to navigate through the sea of people quickly and easily. In saying so, although all of these filters are problematic in their own ways (such as the weight and height filters are associated with body shaming; the age filter is

Figure 2.4: Jack'd's filter
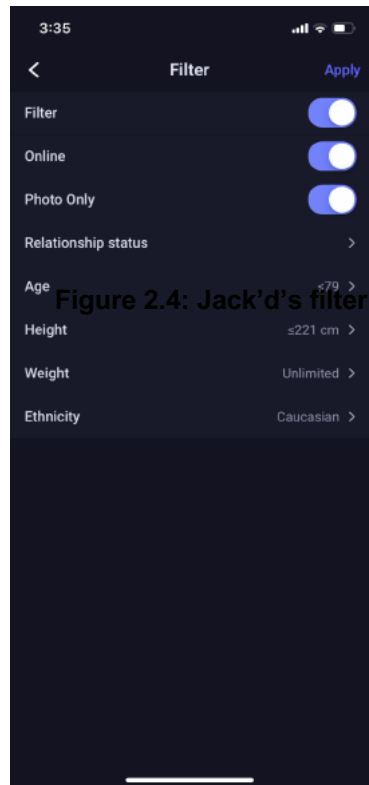
Figure 2.5: Blued's filter

Figure 2.6: An example of ethnic filter from Blued
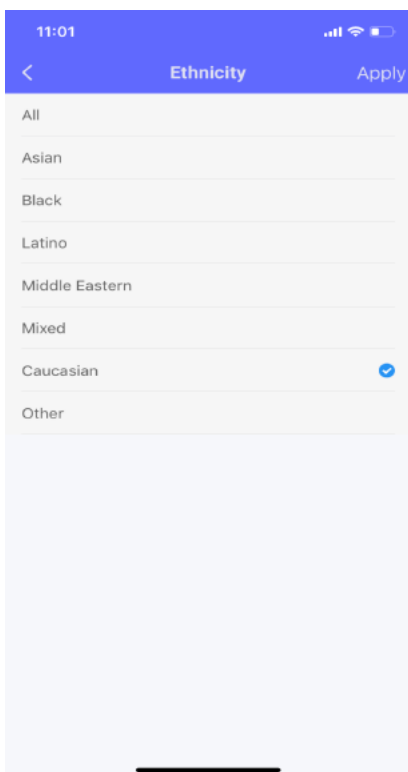
related to ageism; and the ethnic filter is connected to racism). In this section, I want to focus on one filter that is essential to the position of gay Asian migrants in these three apps: the ethnic filter (see Figure 2.6). While the other filters (such as age, height, and weight) are easier to quantify and specify with numbers, ethnicity is not. The existing issue with the ethnic filter across these three apps are twofold: the lack of specificity (the ethnic selections are too broad) and its function in the apps as a filtration criteria. As much as these filters are meant to be a convenient feature for the users, they can become outright problematic and discriminatory especially when we consider an example that feature one of the most controversial filters, the HIV filter introduced by Grindr in 2016.

In 2016, Grindr's developers created an HIV filter to allow people to filter out others on the platform living with HIV, and ran a series of survey to ask its users if they would allow the

filter to go live in the app. This was, of course, highly problematic because it is highly discriminatory. Aside from that, other issues also surfaced: for instance, what if this filter encouraged people living with HIV to hide their status due to increased stigma? At the very least, the filter might encourage such people to hide, thereby rendering people living with HIV invisible. In relation to my previous argument on the specific vision of a homotopia. Grindr's version of it is quite clear: it involves a disease-free utopia where any people living with HIV are rendered invisible by its filtering mechanism. Despite the fact that Grindr made plans to implement the filter, outcries ranging from mainstream media to prominent gay voices ensued, as they were appalled by such a discriminatory function (Garner, 2016; Rodriguez, 2016; Rae, 2016).

This HIV filtration saga is a good point for us to ponder whether these filtration mechanisms, including the ethnic filter found across all gay dating apps, are precursors to discriminatory practices in these apps. The ethnic filter in particular, is detrimental to gay Asian migrants and other ethnic minorities. Furthermore, we need to address why there is little objection from the 'gay community' in regards to ethnic filtering, which is equally as problematic as the HIV filter. Is this because the voice of the minority within a minority community is not being heard effectively? This would suggest their voice is not as prominent as the mainstream users who prefer to have these filters implemented. This also circles back to my earlier argument of how these apps are designed for the mainstream, which are mainly affluent gay White middle class men who use these apps and they are generally unaffected by the ethnic filter. In a recent interview with Buzzfeed, the founder of Scruff (one of the other gay mobile dating apps in the market) defended their position of maintaining the problematic ethnic filter that contains highly generalised ethnic categories in the apps:

> A person's choice of partner is deeply personal," says Silverberg. "And I don't think we would presume to judge or tilt one's choice of sexual partner, boyfriend, or husband." He continues: "Ultimately each one of our own individual choices is profoundly informed by the community we grow up in, perhaps by the relationships we had with our siblings or parents. I mean, to try and unpack that would probably take years for each person and so…I don't know…I give wide latitude to other people when they talk about the kind of people they're into (Strudwick, 2016).

By shifting the focus of users being ethnically profiled and filtered by others to a highly personal preference, the developers assume a position whereby racist filtration mechanisms in these apps are nothing but a convenient tool for users to locate the object of their own desire. This thinking echoes my earlier point as to how under a neoliberal disguise, the victim of racism is meant to exercise self-blaming, and where one can

only blame the other's personal preference that results in a racially charged exchange on these platforms. In addition, this 'personal preference' also rejects the possibility that standards of attractiveness may be internalised from larger culture and social norms. Racism is thus perfectly disguising itself under the mask of so-called 'personal preference', leaving the victims of such a form of racism to often report feeling helpless to counter this claim (Riggs, 2013; Robinson, 2015). This phenomenon of personal preferences will be explored further in Chapter Four, specifically looking at how gay Asian migrants deal with it. Nonetheless, the second half of the quote from the Scruff founders is equally important: they acknowledge that our choices are profoundly informed by the community and the world we grew up in, which also echoes my earlier argument that the ways in which we choose to represent ourselves are informed by wider cultural influences. Thus, we are still shackled to norms of attractiveness that the majority of the gay community deems desirable and legitimate. I would argue that the Scruff founders' defence of the filtration system is a cultural as well as a political and economic one. First, by defending the filtration system that benefits and maintains Whiteness as the default position and dominant power, the apps' developers secure the majority's interest, which, of course, boosts sales and subscriptions from the major users. Second, insisting on and implementing ethnic filtering, however much founded in 'personal preference', it is arguably a move towards inclusivity that is flawed and naive. The developers' decision to implement ethnic selection is a vague move towards a more inclusive environment (if we take out the filtering mechanism down the line that this ethnic selection is serving) by allowing their users to choose and identify with their background. However, the issues lie within the fact that these ethnic filters are not only generalised and unable to represent users accurately (ethnic label such as 'Asian' that lacks specificity), the ethnic filter is ultimately designed for ethnic profiling and filtering in these apps, which makes it easier for users to pick and choose what ethnicities they want to see around them. This circles back to my earlier argument of the homotopia, where in this instance, ethnic filtering helps to foster a version of homotopia for users to pick and choose which ethnicities are included in their utopia.

On the flip side of the coin, such ethnic filtering could potentially reduce public racism on users' profiles that clearly broadcast racist ideals (such as no Asian and no Black) by allowing other users to filter out such users privately, without making their racist remarks or ethnic 'preference' publicly visible. The 'silent filtering' could potentially reduce some level of public harm suffered by victims of racism. However, there is clearly a contradiction here: it seems that the developers are countering overt racism by implementing a more invisible form of racism, namely the ethnic filter. In other words, by masking ethnic filtering through the format of compulsory individual profile identification, visible racism is swept under the rug, which leaves the company able to appear to be supporting diversity. However, they still allow racism masked as 'personal preference' to

be covertly operating at the discretion of their users with the help of this filtering mechanism. In relation to the economic factor, having these filters also grants their users a sense of pseudo-agency, where users are asked to pay for the premium subscription in order to receive further filtration affordances that make their discriminations about a potential partner more efficient.

Looking at the embedded filtering system within the UI of these apps, it becomes apparent that the need for these apps to categorise their users into manageable data has a huge influence on how we perceive others and ourselves. The consistent categorisation of users is, subsequently, fed back into the filtration mechanism, which works in tandem with such a categorisation. The background to this filtration mechanism is, of course, not just a cultural one but a profit-oriented one as well. In order to keep users on the verge of wanting to subscribe to their premium features, which usually come with more filtration mechanisms (which is often synonymous with more agency to choose), the free versions of these apps often limit how well one can filter, how much one can see in terms of another user's profile, as well as how much one can do with these apps. For instance, Jack'd's users need to pay for the premium subscription before they can filter out profiles that contain no pictures at all; in similar veins, Grindr separates its filters into two categories, and users will have to pay for premium subscription before they can access the 'advanced filters' - see Figure 2.4).Thus, to have the upper hand in curating one's homotopia by being able to filter people out, one will have to be economically viable to pay for the premium subscription. It also means that people who are unable to afford the premium version of these apps miss out on the full capabilities to filter out everything they dislike; they are, in effect, able to discriminate less well amongst other users. What we are witnessing on the development of these apps is arguably going in the opposite direction of what the notion of gay community is trying to foster; instead, it creates a heightened sense of discrimination for those who can afford it that the gay community has been trying to mask for years, namely, sexism, ageism, and racism based on class difference.

2.4.2 User profile

Each user must create a profile when they sign up to these apps (see Figure 2.7 and 2.8). These profiles are made up of a few important components: user names, profile pictures, display of individual interests (such as what they are looking for, their basic demographic details and more), and a short written introduction. When they first sign up, users are required to fill in basic demographic details of themselves, such as age, ethnicity, location and so on. Users are also encouraged to upload a photo of themselves, as seen in Blued's login page reminding new users that a profile with pictures is more likely to get responses from other users. Once

everything has been filled in, a user's profile is complete and it will become their gateway to being visible to other users. One important thing to note here is the ways in which users can fill in their information. Aside from

Figure 2.7: Blued profile set up with word restrictions.
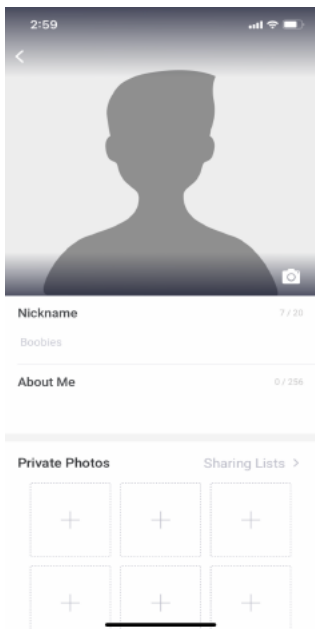
a very short written statement that allows room for improvisation, the rest of the user's profile is made up of selections from drop-down menus that present a limited range of possible choices. For instance, for the option of sexual position in Grindr, users can only choose from a fixed variation of drop-down options: bottom, top, versatile, vers-top, or vers-bottom. Users can definitely choose to leave these options blank; however, as I will further illustrate in Chapter Five, the increasing demand of these apps for their users to be authentic and genuine to others also means leaving these identity markers blank becoming a rather unfavoured choice due to the risk of being seen as inauthentic. Drawing on the research journal from my earlier field observation, there are multiple instances where some users' profiles explicitly stated that they will not reply to a 'blank profile', which often refers to profiles that are leaving these options blank intentionally. This illustrate how leaving these identity options as blank could serve as a disadvantage for any users who do so.

Figure 2.8: An example of Grindr's user profile set up.
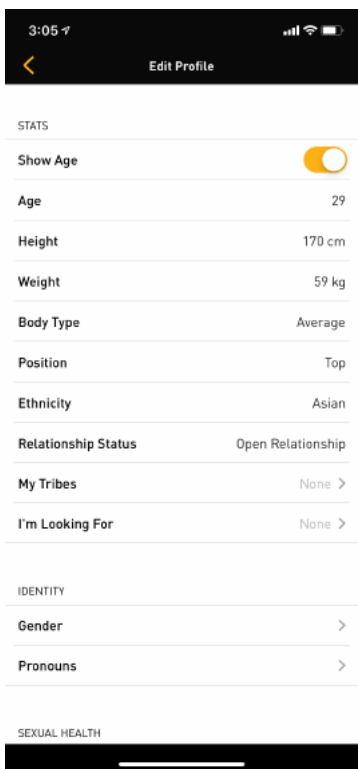
There are also further restrictions when it comes to setting up a new profile. As the format has already been pre-determined, users can only provide information that is requested specifically by the apps, instead of having freedom of present information that transcends the existing digital format. For instance, users' uploaded pictures of themselves have to be approved by the apps (cross-check by a built-in algorithm that detects lewd content); the size of the grid determines the kind of pictures one should upload (for instance, Grindr features a square grid, which will cut off a standard full body picture); the amount of characters one can use on their profile to introduce themselves is limited. These features are slightly different across these apps. For instance, Grindr affords the least amount of space for a written introduction on a user's profile, only allowing 250 characters, and Jack'd has arguably the most generous space for written introduction, with 2000 characters. Blued sits close to Grindr, with 256 characters available for users to write their self-introduction. All these options on a user profile contribute to a very specific vision of what a modern gay

identity should be like: concise, crisp, and instantly recognisable according to stereotypical representations. This lack of freedom in composing one's own introduction is partially compensated for by the focus on one's visual representation as a way of introducing oneself to another.

In comparison to the previous web-based dating formats, gay mobile dating apps essentially downsize the amount of information each user can have on their profile, and attribute a significant amount of attention to user's pictures of themselves. This phenomenon is a restriction both on hardware and software. As these apps are only available on mobile phones, the ways in which information is packaged has changed to a more concise and less cluttered presentation, since the size of mobile phone screens is small in comparison to a computer. Furthermore, the emphasis on pictures on these profiles, as well as the main interface consisting of a grid of different pictures, allows users to click onto any profile easily without having to specifically click on characters.

From a software perspective, the developers design these apps intentionally to make their users focus on specific aspects of their user profile. Since individual information and the space to provide these details are very limited, users are encouraged to represent themselves more visually than literarily. This is evidenced in all three apps, where users' pictures are the main selling point of each profile. There are also identical restrictions when it comes to uploading profile pictures across all three apps; lewd content (such as naked bodies) and pictures of one's genital is not permitted. These three apps deploy algorithm to detect pictures that are prohibited and users' picture can be rejected. This restriction on profile pictures is another illustration of how the apps' have direct control over every users' self-representation, and it also demonstrates that these restrictions on specific profile picture are an attempt of these three apps to cultivate specific representation of their users to fit their vision of homotopia. Although the intention of the developers is to provide easy access to their users, what they have yet to consider is that this restriction on the amount of information on these platforms has resulted in problematic methods of self-representation,   and has also reduced identity into instantly recognisable markers in a stereotypical fashion. For instance, every users are either a 'top', a 'bottom' or 'versatile' when it comes to sex positions on all three apps; and for apps like Grindr, every users are boxed into stereotypical gay subcultural identities, such as 'twinks', 'bear', 'daddy' and more. Furthermore, this focus on visual presentation also fosters a new type of exchange currency on these platforms: users are now required to post at least a picture of themselves before other users will speak to them. It has now become a standard and accepted practice in these three apps whereby a picture of someone's face is necessary for any subsequent communications to begin. Users who choose not to upload an identifiable photo of their face can

choose to send their picture manually and privately to the person they are chatting to, which is also a standard practice for users that has no visible picture of themselves in their profile. Additionally, this visual orientation user profiles encourages a very specific version of modern online identity, namely, authenticity through visual visibility. The assumption is that users who have a picture of themselves in their profile are more likely to be a genuine person in real life, and the picture works as an evidence to verify their offline identity and existence. In this regard, the written content on any given profile only works as a complementary feature to the profile picture, which is in contrast to earlier web-based dating practice where there were more written content rather than pictures, mostly due to technological constraints.

Apps developers' vision of these profiles being both the gateway to a homotopia as well as vessels of their own homotopian ideology is highly problematic. Not only are users limited to specific selections about how to best represent themselves through a few drop-down identity markers, but they are also being boxed according to specific gay cultural stereotypes (e.g., if you're a 'bottom', then you must be feminine; or gay Asian men are generally more passive). This is detrimental in a long run, since these apps are being used on a daily basis and thus their users are socialised into adopting simplistic and reductionistic 'modern' gay representations without many alternative options. In particular, gay ethnic minorities find themselves marginalised even further through these ways of setting up a profile, as the identity markers provided by these apps are either too vague or too western-centric to represent their cultural background. This is further evident in the profile's ethnicity selection, where options are limited to terms such as Asian, South Asian, Middle Eastern, White, Latino and so on. These ethnic labels are highly generalised as they seemingly group various ethnic groups into one category that erases geographical and cultural differences (For instance, East Asian, Southeast Asian and so on). Despite the fact that we can see that a subcategory of Asian, namely South Asian, has been added into the drop down menu across these three apps (this option is unavailable when these apps first launched), this is still vague as South Asia encompasses various ethnicities and cultures that are very distinct from each other.

2.4.3 Gay men inside a chocolate box: Pictures and grid
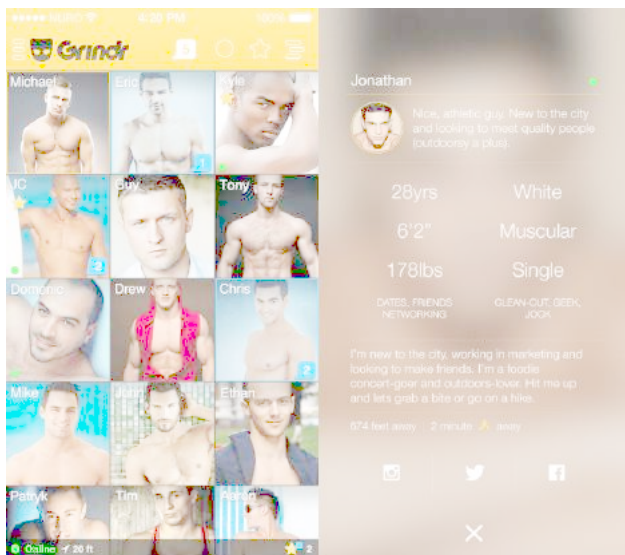
Figure 2.9: An example of Grindr's grid format

All three apps share a common feature when a user first logs in: the dominance of user profiles arranged as a grid that populates at least 90% of the entire interface/mobile phone screen (similar to a chocolate box. See Figure 2.9). There is one pre-determined algorithm that decides who the users can see in the grid, and it is solely based on locations. In other words, users that are in the same locations should see the exact same users that are within their vicinity (unless they manually filter out certain users with the built-in filters). This interface design is significant because it allows the user to see every other user within his vicinity in just one glance, plus or minus a few scrolls. This 'chocolate box' design not only emphasises the selection of users that are on display, but the grid design also allow each object of desire to be nestled inside its own four walls. Moreover, the location tracking allow these 'objects of desire' to be located easily where these apps function as the 'radar' for their users. Among these three apps, Grindr has the biggest profile grid display, which also means users have to scroll further down to see more of other users; Jack'd has a smaller grid design, which allows one to see more of other users without too much scrolling; Blued has the smallest, so user does not need to scroll too many time to see every other user within his vicinity. This chocolate-box grid creates a sense of abundance, as though the screen (and vicinity) were overflowing with gay men each time a user logs in to the apps. This phenomenon of flooding users with profile after profile, through a display saturated with other gay men looking for a connection, is connected to the rhetoric of freedom and choice that these apps are trying to present to their users. It suggests that every user is on an equal footing in terms of finding partners for their pleasure.   Furthermore, seeing one's picture alongside others' (every user's own profile will appear in the grid just like the other profiles) gives a sense to the user that he is part of this modern online gay community, which boosts a sense of belonging alongside a promise of connection.

This is another attempt by the apps creators to foster a homotopia, by creating a visual space that is filled with other gay men looking for the same thing. What is more important is that the creators assume that everyone enjoys equal access to other users and their profiles, without considering how this feature itself is a paradox: not everyone shares the same level of freedom when it comes to choosing their potential partners. In other

words, this homotopia that these apps are creating is already based in a world of unequal access. Every user can see the same profiles providing they are in the same vicinity, but not everyone can have all the benefits of the chocolate-box abundance of guys. This display feature that emphasises the hundreds of men within the vicinity neglects the fact that not every 'product' is equally available for all to consume. The emphasis on the abundance of user profiles underscores the freedom and choice when it comes to partner selection. There are practically no restriction for users to click into any of the pictures that are on display, at least not by the app developers themselves. It allows the illusion of freedom within a 'marketplace' where users are able to purchase any of the goods, but only with specific social capital that are conditioned by our current cultural climate.

There are several prominent issues associated with this design. First, it reduces all users into 'products' that are on constant display for easy consumption. This means that users are simplifying their complex identity down to a picture, hoping for split-second attention from other users. This process of simplification of one's online identity is further aided by the design of the interface itself, which is designed for the purpose of simplifying everyone's online identity into digestible data and representation. Second, it is assumed that users are responsible for their ability to be their best self through the display of their selected profile picture, which conceals the fact that the profile options are highly structured and restricted in the first place.
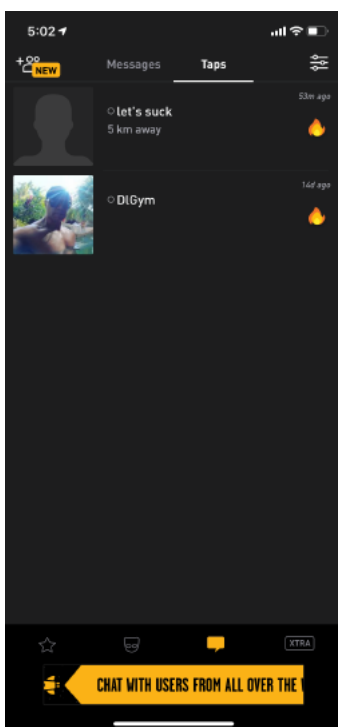
Figure 2.10: An example of Grindr's 'tap' system that notifies a user when someone has 'tapped' them.

In a way, this grid-formatted interface seems to present diversity to its users; at first glance, there is a range of other users with different profile pictures with slight variations in how they represent themselves. This is due to the fact these apps allow their users to upload any picture of themselves with some restrictions (there are restrictions on lewd profile pictures which are not allow on public profile but they can be exchanged privately between users, or any pictures that are deemed illegal such as picture of minors), hence the different types of
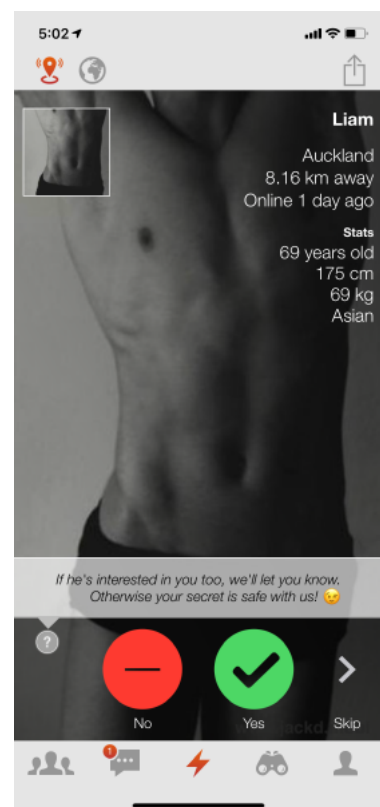
Figure 2.11: An example of Jack'd matchmaking system.

pictures. This level of diversity is arguably constructed to create the illusion of multiple choices and variety of gay men within the vicinity. The grid format also helps with presenting this 'diversity', where different user pictures are situated together next to each other for maximum contrast. However, the paradox of this is that beneath all the diversity one might start to experience a sense of uniformity instead of individuality in these pictures. Especially when the grid is filled with pictures that follow similar conventions, with either focusing on just the torso or a selfie that emphasises on the face. When we look at the press kits that these apps have published (see Figure 2.9), the uniformity amidst the diversity is jarring. This uniformity also suggests that the users have internalised the cultural as well as technological standards of self-representation, where everyone attempts to follow everyone else's uniform idea of what/who is attractive.

2.4.4 Communication features

These three apps have various communication features that allow users to communicate (or not) to each other in various ways. Users on all three platforms are able to message other users through a direct messaging function, which is similar to any other texting function on our mobile phone. This texting function is limited to one-on-one communication, meaning that a user can only message one user at a time.   Aside from the basic texting function, all three apps also boast different features that allow users to communicate differently. These functions are also exclusive to each apps as they all have different mode of communication for their users to adopt. Moreover, these different communication features are one of the selling points/distinctions of these three apps from one to another, and they also determine how users can connect to others. For instance, Grindr feature a 'tap system' (see Figure 2.10), where users can click on a little icon within another user's profile and it will instantly send a notification to that person. This works like a instant notification that will 'nudge' the

Figure 2.12: An example of Blued's live streaming function.

recipient. The 'tap system' is actually consistent to the overall ideology of gay mobile dating apps in general: instant gratification without further need to explain each other's desire in words but solely dependent on one's profile picture and its attractiveness. This also circles back to my previous argument as to how pictures/visuality are an essential component for these three apps to function. Jack'd, on the other hand,

features a 'match-making' function (see Figure 2.11) that will randomly pair up users. This function is very similar to that of Tinder's, where users are paired and they can choose to click yes or no to the pairing. Once both parties have clicked yes, they are then connected to each other and are able to chat to each other. On Jack'd, this function can be rather redundant, seeing that most guys around a user's vicinity are on constant display and they can talk to whoever they want without the need of a virtual match determined by algorithms. However, the gamification of relationship through this virtual match also makes it exciting for users who are limited by where they are located, as they can be matched to someone else that might not appear on his grid due to the location he is in. Furthermore, the matchmaking system also requires less initial communication from both users manually as the matchmaking algorithm automatically connects two users to people that they are interested in, and they can begin chatting to each other after both have simultaneously agreed with the matchmaking result. On the other hand, Blued has the richest communication features among the three apps. Aside from the standard texting feature, it has a live streaming function (see Figure 2.12), where users can broadcast themselves to many users and they are not restricted by its location (i.e. Users can broadcast themselves to audiences all over the world, rather than just immediate location around him); additionally, it also has 'groups' that are specific to each locale, where users are free to create groups for others to join (see Figure 2.13). For example, in the Auckland area, these groups range from sock fetish groups to groups of gay Asian men looking for gay White men only. Furthermore, the 'stream' feature in this app features another channel of visual communication, as it allows users to search for and follow popular hashtags found in the apps, to which they can contribute by uploading relevant pictures. This function is similar to both Twitter and Instagram, where users are actively contributing relevant materials to maintain the popularity of a particular hashtag.
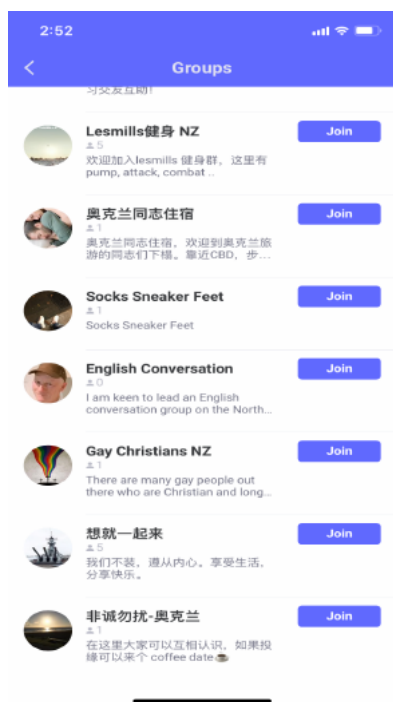
Figure 2.13: The 'group' feature in Blued.

These different features highlight the ways in which the app creators' visions are tied to technical communication processes. For instance, the focus of Blued on multi-channel communications (video streaming, groups, and streams) can be seen as fostering a communal feeling amongst its users, since they can talk to people with similar interests. Additionally, this mode of communication is similar to that of Instagram and Facebook, where users are able to experience group- and community-based ways of engaging with the interface. Grindr and Jack'd's communication features are more restrictive in comparison, where they emphasise one-to-one communication rather than multi-channel communication. In

this instance, the discreet means of communication (such as one-to-one messaging and a discreet

matchmaking process) signals a private affair that benefit from discretion.

Blocking communications

Although the main selling point of these apps is arguably their ability to allow users to communicate with each

other, it is also possible, in the case of harassment, for users to 'block' others to prevent any further

conversation from happening. This feature was originally intended to help users cope with any online bullying

and harassment. However, aside from the original intention, this function has been subverted by users who

have appropriated it as a means of filtering and creating a more exciting environment for themselves. Even

without any bullying or harassment, users are free to block anyone without needing an explanation or

rationale. This also means that users can actively block anyone whom they do not like, based on their personal

preference. Once a profile is blocked, the emptied out grid space in the interface is then replaced by another

brand-new profile. Since users who do not pay for the additional features can only see a limited number of

profiles (the only exception to this instance is Blued, where users can see unlimited profiles for free, as the

apps' operating model has changed to a live-streaming/dating apps in recently years), blocking those whom

they are not interested in results in those slots being replaced with newer profiles; blocking thus becomes a

workaround for users with a free account who want to see more guys in the vicinity. Although there's a limit on

how many people one can block in any given period, this unintended function fuels users to further personalise

their homotopia by blocking other users and surrounding themselves with guys that they find attractive and

interesting. For users on Grindr, paying for the premium features also allows them to have an 'unlimited block'

function, but this does not prevent blocking from being used to refresh the page and show the 'right' kind of

guys in the vicinity. Blocking thus constitutes a problematic phenomenon on these platforms, since users can

create a personal homotopia by excluding people based on very limited, usually visual, information about their

identity. In a way, the blocking feature illustrates how interface design and features can be subverted for other

purposes. In this instance, it is a feature that can be subverted to eliminate other users based on one's

ideologically loaded personal preference. The blocking feature thus becomes an ideological tool for users to

filter out people based on discriminatory discourse, besides its obvious function as a defensive tool for online

harassment.

2.4.5 Paying features
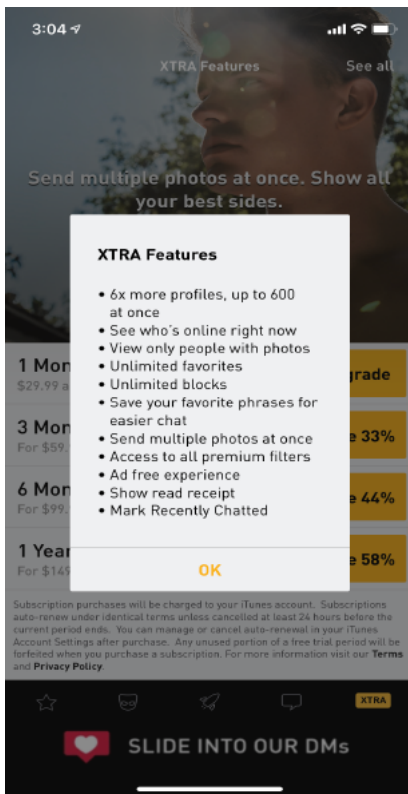
Figure 2.14: An example of Grindr's paid-features.

Jack'd and Grindr feature various paid-for features that can be unlocked when users subscribe to them (see Figure 2.14). Blued is slightly different when it comes to paid features: it exercises a 'beans system', where users can purchase 'beans' (the currency) to tip off other viewers when they are about to do a live broadcast via the app. Blued is also the only app among these three that does not have a premium version of its platform. These paid features are consciously built into the platform by the developers, as they generate profit for the developers. If the previously discussed filtration mechanism is the first step towards a personalised homotopia for their users, then these paying features allow an even more honed-in vision of homotopia, although they do so on the basis of limiting the agency of users based solely on monetary value and buying power. While Grindr and Jack'd let their users enjoy the premium version of the app without additional expense when they first sign up, this premium version disappears after a set time frame, leaving their users with the free and basic version of the app. The free version of these apps comes with many restrictions, such as the lack of filtering options, constant pop-up advertising, and a significantly reduced number of visible profiles of guys in any given location. If these apps are creating a homotopia, this utopia is definitely a paid-for feature. Without the extra features, these apps are very restrictive, although they still use the procedural rhetoric of choice amidst a homotopia. All these limitations are there to remind the users that they must pay to enjoy the premium functions of the apps, giving them access to another homotopia within a homotopia.

In a way, the premium paid-subscription is the only feature where gay Asian migrant users are able to exert more power than the other features. However, this paid feature is based on one user having more control over his subsequent actions on the platform, such as being able to filter out profiles more specifically, or seeing more profiles than a standard free account; it does not, however, protect them from the consequences of others' actions, such as being filtered out by other users or being ignored based on their identity and social position. In other words, these paid features are preemptive, which ultimately renders these pay features as an instrument of imagined control, with no actual benefit. These extra features do not allow one to engage in any further in-depth representation, or to enrich one's profile; it only enhances the overall functioning of the app for

the user, such as better search options, better filters, more profiles displayed and so on. But the depth of a user's identity on these platform is arguably the most important factor to attract other users in the first place. For instance, if a gay Asian migrant user subscribes to these pay features, he is given more control over the number of guys that he is seeing or additional filters, such as distance from his location. However, he is not given any additional room for adding depth to his profile, which in turn would allow him to signal his authenticity or sincerity, nor is he allowed any features that would change the perceptions and attitudes of the wider community towards gay Asian migrants. Furthermore, even though he has more options for navigating through the app, if he has already been filtered out by other users that he would like to connect with, these pay features will not reverse that.

Finally, if one subscribes to a premium account, whether on Jack'd or Grindr, this status is not made public to other users of the app, which means users are not going to treat premium members any differently or more favourably. Blued is the only exception here, where users who are tipped with 'beans' will be aware of the tipper. This puts the tippers in a favourable position in relation to the other users, since the people who are tipped with these 'beans' are able to convert them into real money by providing their bank account details to the apps. Of all three apps, Blued is the only one where the status of a user is elevated because of their purchasing power. As a result, other users are more inclined to connect with users that are tipping them as well as maintaining rapport with them, which also transforms the nature of their relationship into a transactional one. Although the pay features in these three apps are helpful in terms giving more control to the users in terms of navigating the platform, these features hardly empower the already marginalised gay Asian migrant users or other gay ethnic men, nor improve their position in the gay community. This is especially true with both Grindr and Jack'd. On the other hand, although Blued's tipping system could potentially alleviate the position of marginalised gay men through transaction-based interaction, it does not solve the underlying discriminatory issues or the designs that encourage them.

2.5 Summary

These apps are very similar when it comes to their interface designs and features, with the exception of Blued, which boasts several added features. Although the interface designs are seemingly neutral, in fact they reinforce certain ideologies, much in the way that Aunspach (2015) points out that these apps are actively 'arguing' for a particular position and encouraging the user to see the world from the perspective of the interface. This is also where Bogost's (2007) study of procedural rhetoric comes directly into play, since the

computational processes that uphold the apps create a set of persuasive rhetoric, which in turn persuade the users to pick up the developers' vision and ideology. Furthermore, these computational codes and programmes structure and regulate the ways in which we interact with the digital artefacts, creating a whole system of representation that distils problematic discourses of race and sexuality, and maintains them through limited profile choices and specific labels. To make it even more complex, these apps then repackage these limited choices into a brand of individual freedom that is customisable through their interfaces, such as ethnic selection, types of photos to upload, and how a profile is written, albeit with limited choices.

The interlocking mechanisms of these interface designs and features across the three apps cannot, and should not, be viewed in isolation. All of these designs and features are layered one upon the other, which ultimately forms the current apps that we are seeing and using. By using the walkthrough method and examining the registration and log-on process step by step, this chapter has interrogated five features that are commonly found across all three apps: filters, user profiles, grid format of the interface, communication methods, and paid features. This interrogation has revealed that these three apps have each created a vision of an online homotopia in quite similar terms, as a visually erotic marketplace populated by hundreds of gay men, with added filtration functionality to make pursuing these desires easier and quicker. This is evident in all of the features discussed. When combined, these features unashamedly promote a quick transactional type of connection among users, reducing the modern online gay community into both a sexual market and product that can be bought and sold.

The rhetoric of choice is found across all of these features, with the procedural rhetoric of the these apps keen to imply that the users themselves are solely responsible for the choices they make within these apps. This ranges from how they represent themselves in their profile, to how they choose to communicate with other users, and whether or not to pay for the premium features. The 'choice' that each individual makes (from what they write on their profile to which photo they upload) is subsequently taken as the ultimate reason for why they might fail to connect with others. Against this, any suggestion that the apps' developers are implementing a system, based on the cultural biases of the gay community, that alienates specific ethnicities is kept at bay. What we need to remember is that this rhetoric of choice is created by the apps' developers and supported by their procedural rhetoric; these apps steer users' (self) representation by implementing interface designs that are both restrictive and uniform for all users. On top of the apps' restrictive profile options that masquerade as the freedom to self-representation, the other catch here is that these interface designs mimic the overall

attitudes and cultural preferences of the gay community, which subsequently informs how users represent

themselves through the existing interface design.

Chapter Three

Interface analysis

The previous chapter examined how interface designs of the three apps serve as the regulator and gatekeeper of their users' experience. This chapter extends the discussion of user interfaces, and examines the underlying impacts and consequences of the interface, especially for gay Asian migrant users. This chapter looks into how the interface designs of these apps affect the current state of gay male culture and vice versa, arguing that the symbiotic relationship between these apps and the gay community privileges certain representations over others, similar to that of the gay community's hierarchy of desire.   As suggested in the last chapter, these interface designs and their components are not as innocent or as neutral as they appear; rather, they encourage a particular logic and flow. Taking into consideration the interface features that I have discussed in Chapter Two, this chapter places emphasis on two features that are   central to the discourse of race in these apps: the visually dominated interface and the ethnic selection drop-down menu.

Two important arguments are proposed in this chapter in relation to the observations that I have made in Chapter Two. First, the interface is designed to place a strong emphasis on visual rhetoric exclusively, such as encouraging users to upload photos of themselves to attract other users. As a result, the user photos become the most important social capital in exchange for potential connections. However, the uploaded photos of users (at least the ones that are popular), as we will subsequently learn, consolidate very specific tropes of representation entrenched within western gay pornography. Gay Asian migrants are unable to fulfil this specific representation, which is mainly rooted in ethnic reality, and thus they are alienated from the mainstream beauty standards against which all desirability is measured. Second, the ethnic labelling system embedded within these apps allows ethnicity to be toggled on and off, which is highly detrimental to gay Asian migrant users. As these apps increasingly encourage their users to be authentic and 'real', which demands that users maintain a consistent biological narrative both offline and online, this labelling system becomes both an important verification of as well as a confinement for gay Asian migrants, who must perform well within their ethnic boundaries.

Two frameworks are deployed in this chapter to look at how these designs affect gay male culture and vice versa, each corresponding to the two main arguments of this chapter. First, the discussion of (dis)embodiment

(Campbell, 2004) becomes particularly important in this chapter as the interface of these apps often asks its users for the display of authenticity through their carnal bodily and facial pictures. The demand for authentic corporeality on these apps is in stark contrast to earlier internet dating websites and chat forums, where users were free to represent themselves in ways that could be different from their offline identity. In addition, this framework serves to undermine the user's agency in terms of freely customising their digital embodiment through the interface. On the contrary, the gay digital space is increasingly seeking an authentic translation of the offline body and customisability of one's identity on these spaces is very limited; users are supposed to verify their online identity as consistent with their biological narrative in reality. It also means that users can only 'customise' their online representation in ways that are supported by their offline identity. Not only this does not allow gay Asian migrants to escape their ethnic reality, but the need for each user to identify their ethnicity also coincides with similar race-relation discourses that are found within the gay community. This purposive identification gives rise to easier ways to discriminate due to the clearly marked racial identities that are voluntarily selected by apps users.

The second framework is Mowlabocus' notion of Cybercarnality (2010), which usefully extends the previously mentioned frameworks by focusing on how the representation of these gay spaces is informed by the pornographic remediation of bodies. I will also be extending Mowlabocus' argument of the online remediation of pornographic bodies by arguing that these apps' interface designs foreground pornographic representations of certain (ethnic) bodies as desirable representation, thus fulfilling Mowlabocus' prognosis that these technologies will become the surveyor and the beholder of westernised desires and beauty hierarchy. As discussed in Chapter Two, the focal point of these apps lies with the pictures of their users displayed in a grid format. Users are constantly being socialised into recognising that specific modes of self-representation will garner more attentions from other users, thus increasing their chances of connecting with others. This forms a very narrow representation that dictates what is considered desirable and what is not, and it is often conditioned by one's ethnicity.

Before we venture into the discussion of why these representations and ethnic emphases on these apps are problematic, we need to understand the basis on which these representations are formed and popularised within the local discourse through these apps. This, of course, starts from the local gay community and the racism that is found in it.

Racism in the gay community in New Zealand is scarcely documented in academia. Although the issue of racism has been noted throughout different gay communities in different localities, such as the United States and Australia, New Zealand's gay community and its undercurrent of racism remains understudied. However, seeing that New Zealand's gay culture is similar to other western countries like Australia's, we can apply similar findings from countries that practice the same culture when it comes to the gay community and its treatment of gay Asian men/migrants. To concretise this point further, New Zealand's gay community arguably mirrors the trajectories and rhetoric practiced by most western gay communities, e.g. the importance of 'coming out' and being proud of one's sexuality, be it legally or socially; the recognition of same-sex marriage by the state; the celebration of sexuality; and unmarked Whiteness as the default and crucial pillar for the gay community.

There is a growing amount of research that documents racism within gay communities in Australia, especially when it comes to gay male Asian migrants' experience. For instance, Caluya (2006), Han (2006) , and Ridge et al. (1999) have identified that gay Asian men are discriminated against based on familiar stereotypes that are often associated with their Asian identity. This includes a feminine personality, smaller penises, passivity when it comes to sex (subservience and being the 'bottom', i.e. recipient of anal sex), the 'money boy' who goes out with older White men for financial support, as well as practicing good hygiene and safe sexual practices (Caluya, 2006; Han, 2006; Ridge et al., 1999). Interestingly, in comparison to all of these characteristics of a stereotypical gay Asian man, the exact opposite of these characteristics is what makes a gay man (presumably White) absolutely desirable. This echoes the framework of cybercarnality theorised by Mowlabocus (2010), which I will discuss shortly. In addition, the label of 'Asian' works as an all-encompassing term to a lot of gay White men, where the differences between each Asian ethnicity are left unquestioned (Han, 2006). Furthermore, gay White men hardly recognise 'White' as a racial category, meaning that it is often unmarked and made into the default that other ethnicities are measured against (Han, 2006).

With all this being said, the gay community in New Zealand manifests similar sentiments when it comes to gay Asian men/migrants, and these sentiments are also enhanced by the interface designs of these apps, which privilege representations that are commonly embraced by the local gay community. In the sections that follow, I will look at how racism in the local gay community manifests through two defining interface designs, with the help of the two frameworks: cybercarnality and (dis)embodiment theory.

3.1 Cybercarnality and visual tropes

The theory of cybercarnality is useful to navigate through the diverse gay male virtual space, and it is also a useful tool to explain the visual culture so prominent in these applications. Cybercarnality is a theoretical framework that "offers a way of talking about an array of cyberspaces constructed and populated by gay men" initially (Mowlabocus, 2010). It is a discursive framework mobilised to understand, identify and examine the common patterns, practices, and rituals that permeate gay digital culture (Mowlabocus, 2010). This theory is useful to debunk the perception of "virtual realities being [perceived as] non-corporeal, [instead of how] gay men's digital culture has long been preoccupied with the re-emergence, reimagining and reevaluating of gay male corporeality" (Mowlabocus, 2010, p. 60). Cybercarnality provides a good explanation as to why gay male digital culture is so invested in pornified bodies, as well as how the gay community maintain the surveillance of these pornified bodies. On top of that, cybercarnality is also a critical framework to trace the origins of these representations prevalent on these apps, and in light of this, I hope it can shed some light on how such representations are reproduced and recreated by these interfaces.

The discourse of Cybercarnality is best understood through two specific elements that are prevalent and highly visible in gay cyberspace: The pornification of the body and self-surveillance and regulation.

3.1.1 Pornographic remediation of the body

Pornographic representation of one's body is probably the most obvious feature that apps users are accustomed to seeing on these dating apps. Our interest in the 'carnal' body and pornography pre-dates the internet (Mowlabocus, 2010). We are exposed to pornographic materials on a daily basis, not just the explicit materials found on porn sites and magazines, but also the subliminal and soft-core materials that one can easily find in fashion magazine spreads, apps like Instagram and even prime time television series such as *Spartacus* and *Game of Thrones*. These materials are a good gauge of how our society is obsessed with carnality and its representation/remediation in daily life. In the case of gay male culture, this seems to be substantially amplified. As Mowlabocus (2010) observes, "pornography is written into the code of gay men's everyday lives" (p. 61). Tziallas' (2015) recent study of dating apps yields a similar argument. He concurs that the digital pornographic images of our self "become gay culture in the globally networked world" (p. 772). Furthermore, these apps are a part of the continual pornification of gay male culture (Mowlabocus, 2010; Paasonen et al., 2007). When a user is using these apps, he is "always and already interpellated within the

regime of pornography" (Tziallas, 2015, p. 771). The "'spreadability of the pornified self, the erotic data of human flesh that keeps the global pornoshere operational is already embedded in the logistic of these [apps] and the bodies of their users" (Tziallas, 2015, p. 771).

Instead of casting judgment on the pornographic lens through which we view each other and on our increasingly pornified visual culture, the historical significance of porn and its political capabilities should be acknowledged. Earlier sexual liberation (feminism) and gay rights movements in the 1960s (Stonewall riots in 1968) saw gay porn as one of the political tools to drive social change, since gay porn could be used to challenge the assumption that heteronormative sex acts are the only way to perform sexuality. Feminists' and queer activists' visions of what porn should be, or gay porn in this matter, have offered significant resistance to the dominance of the heterosexual masculine pornographic imagination. Prominent LGBT and race scholar Richard Dyer (1992) suggests that gay porn defends the practice of same-sex physical contact. Gay porn makes alternative sexuality and practices visible. The outstanding role of gay porn in the history of sexual liberation also helps to explain why gay male culture is so heavily invested in the discourse of pornography, mainly due to the political power that it has granted them. As McNair (1996) observes, "gay male pornography is, from this point of view, an important part of the struggle for social recognition and legitimation of a marginalised sexual community" (p. 130). Consequentially, this investment in visual and sexualised materials pervades our digital environment and informs the ways our bodies are represented online. One important thing that is missing from this discussion of a historically situated pornified body is the fact that these bodies are racialised; thus, the reference to any pornification of the gay male body is always referring to a White body, which is everything that an Asian body is not.

These three mobile applications did not just subject bodies to some objectifying and perverted gaze; instead, we have already been socialised and encouraged by a history of activism as well as the media to look at bodies in specific ways. Our current mobile applications are just an amplified reflection of such a perverse gaze. In fact, these mobile applications are built out of and founded upon these cultural trends. Thus, they cannot be imagined outside of this highly eroticised and sexualised culture they were born out of. For instance, the bombardment of carnal body pictures appears as the essence of one's profile on these apps. We have learned to commodify and to read online bodies and faces in a specific way, which is influenced heavily by western gay pornography. Subsequently, this constructs the trope of what the majority of the western gay community deems as attractive and desirable, and it also sets up beauty standards that gay men routinely police and survey each other for. Aside from the political role that gay pornography has played, which

subsequently explains the investment of the gay self in pornography, gay men are more reliant on gay pornography to develop a sense of self in a world that has little in the way of role models or reference points when they are growing up, unlike their heterosexual counterparts, who have a "vast array of resources upon which to draw when constructing and maintaining identity" (Mowlabocus, 2010, p. 70). Thus, this reliance on gay pornography shapes the way gay men construct their gay subjectivity, evident in the users' self-representation in these apps.

In Mowlabocus' work, cybercarnality references gay male pornography as the basis on which most online users depend for their online representation. What he has yet to expand on, however, is where non-White gay men fit within this highly westernised and masculinised representation that excludes them. Since Asian representation in mainstream gay male pornography is very limited and they are often assigned stereotypical roles based on their ethnicity, how are gay Asian migrants to find their point of reference? More important, how can they find a point of reference that is going to enable them to break free from the Western beauty standards that exclude them? Mowlabocus's notion of cybercarnality thus set up the important backdrop of my argument, where the pornified body that is popularised by these apps becomes the most difficult obstacle for gay Asian migrants to bypass.

3.1.2 Cybersurveillance

The second element of cybercarnality is about self-regulation. Slightly different than the pornographic body, the aim here is to produce the Foucauldian version of a 'docile body' to morph into a fully functional and desirable gay man (Mowlabocus, 2010). This does, however, circle back to the notion of cybercarnality, where this vision of a well-regulated and maintained body is part of the appeal of the ultimately desirable body. According to Foucault (1977), "a body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved" (p.136). The regulated and docile body can be achieved through disciplining oneself by adhering to the community's standards. Under this notion, the bodies of gay men are constantly surveyed and governed by each other, and this forms a surveying cycle that runs on its own. This second notion is a stark contrast in comparison to the taken-for-granted concept of cyberspace being a potentially liberating space, as well as being a space that everyone can be what they want to be. Mowlabocus (2010) argues that the concept of cybersurveillance originated from the historical context of gay men being subjected to the regime of surveillance by the state during the HIV/AIDS epidemic as part of a strategic prevention plan, as the HIV/AIDS epidemic was construed as a 'gay plague' in the 1980s. According to Mowlabocus, this also creates a -self-surveillance mechanism that

is deeply entrenched in the gay community, where gay men are constantly surveying each other, looking out and scrutinise each other to be a 'better version' of themselves.

The historical context of this form of self-surveillance arises from the medicalisation of same-sex desires and sexual activities in order to regulate so-called 'deviant' and 'tainted bodies' of gay men by the state (Mowlabocus, 2010). With the rise of HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s, the state was trying to make sense of homosexuality through medical discourse. For instance, state governments were seeking to pathologise homosexuality, through discourses such as sickness and mental disorder. Driven by fear at the peak of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the state also tried to regulate and educate through regimes that further medicalised the sexual activities between two men, such as through the use of a condom and the introduction of STI check-ups. As a result, it has now become a responsibility of gay men to self-regulate and discipline themselves into the 'docile body' that can be sanctioned and regulated by the state (Mowlabocus, 2010).

Presently, such a surveying notion is not so much about controlling the epidemic, since modern medicine has largely kept it under control; rather, it has become depoliticised into a more subtle and cosmetic notion. For instance, gay men continue to be self-regulating for mostly cosmetic objectives, such as disciplining themselves to be more desirable, and to follow closely along the line of 'self-improvement', to be "healthier, fitter, sexier, more desirable, and ultimately, 'better'" (Mowlabocus, 2010, p.60). This 'desirable' projection of the perfect gay man adheres to the standards of western gay pornography and the specific tropes of masculinity found in it. In this instance, it means being White, having a toned body, being well educated and middle-class, as well as having large genitalia.

This 'project' of becoming the 'ultimate specimen' is driven and underpinned by neoliberalism, whereby one's body becomes one's personal responsibility in a never-ending quest to improve the body as a site of possibilities (Mowlabocus, 2010). In relation to our previous discussion on cybercarnality, this form of self-surveillance aims to reach a particular goal in the current social climate: to retain and to maintain pornified bodies worthy of consumption by others. However, I argue that physical attractiveness is not the only thing that is constantly surveyed by and in the community; ethnicity is now part of it as well. When the predominantly White gay community self-regulates, surveys, and associates physical attractiveness directly with gay western pornography, gay Asian migrant users become outcasts, as they are often not worthy of being regulated since their masculinity is hardly featured in these tropes. Consequentially, gay Asian migrant users, alongside with

other ethnic minorities, are left out of this self-surveillance cycle and are seen as unattractive based on the standards centred around Whiteness as the ultimate qualifying criterion for being desirable and attractive.

It is rather intriguing to note that these applications are not too selective about who can join their platform (aside from obvious legal requirements such as age and so on). Through Mowlabocus's critical framework, it becomes apparent that, since gay men are actively regulating themselves and indirectly imposing their standards onto others, these applications are relying on the very same mechanism to regulate their members, without the need of ever intervening themselves. These applications encourage their users to look at themselves and others through a pornographic lens. As a visual-dependent technology, these apps and their interface designs favour visuals over words. Moreover, this poses a challenge to their users: how does one present a picture of oneself that communicates everything about one? Abiding by the rules and standards imposed both by the apps and by the community, subjecting oneself to the pornographic body image and representing oneself through it is perhaps the easiest way to do so. As far as pornographic representation goes, its root is still largely confined within the western ideal of beauty and attractiveness. To revisit Kong's argument that I have proposed earlier, to be attractive is to be White, educated, middle-class, and toned. Although these static categories can be achieved through various methods, such as getting an education, moving through classes relying on meritocracy, and going to the gym to stay toned and desirable, the only thing impossible for gay Asian migrant users to achieve is to change their ethnicity.

3.2. Visual Domination: the worshipping of the gay White body

Situated firmly within the visual culture where we are in presently, these apps are prominent on visuals instead of anything else as I have argued in Chapter Two. As technologies are changing, social media branding are increasingly changing their interface to focus more on images and visual stimulation. The recent move of Facebook adding in the instant photo and video function similar to Instagram's 'Story' feature is a good indication of our fixation and obsession with images and visuals. These apps are not afraid of exemplifying their characteristic through the interface design as a visually dominated medium. When logging into any of the mentioned apps, their interfaces are quite similar: users are greeted with boxes of profiles filled with a large picture of other users. The common representation of profile pictures on these apps mostly consists of torso shots, and occasionally some face pictures. The type of users' photos varies from apps to apps, as some apps are encouraging their users to upload more face pictures of themselves instead. I will discuss the

representation of user profiles in Chapter Five, as this chapter is strictly on why the architecture and interface designs of these apps are fostering a particular representation.

The interface designs across all three apps are similar to the box of chocolates where when we open the box, the chocolates inside the box are all on display. Most apps allow their users to include a brief introduction of themselves within their profile, with very restrictive word limits. Jack'd is an exception, since it allows its users to have a longer word limit to introduce themselves. The restricted writing elements in these apps then force our attention into the picture instead, where it follows the cliché of 'the picture speaks a thousand words'. Consequentially, the picture becomes the centre of one's identity in these spaces, where one's profile picture is to replace words and to relay all individuals' information. This identity formation and identification through a tiny grid size picture of the users themselves echo Massumi's (1992) assertion that identity is "actualised in images, in an instantaneous redescent of the plane of transcendence toward the flesh, via a technical or social apparatus or medium" (p. 112). The size of the 'box' each profile is on also worth mentioning. The size of the grid is arguably designed to showcase a larger photo; this means that shots that include the whole body will look better and more in line with the size of the grid. The pre-determined size of the grid also means if a user were to upload a picture that only contains a headshot, it would not look as good in the grid in comparison. I am not suggesting that the interface designer is doing this on purpose, but perhaps it does reveal to us   what and where their focus is. Furthermore, this chocolate box grid design is where every user will first encounter when they sign into the apps. Thus, it is not at all that difficult to imagine how users are trying to upload pictures of themselves that would warrant a good first impression on their profile picture. In the case of these apps being a hook-up device, the user is to advertise his corporeality. The reliance on the apps to provide users with some clues as to how and what to do in them is in line with Light'et al.'s (2016) walkthrough method, in which users' behaviour is often guided by the basis and the nature of the apps. Consequentially, this reliance on the image itself fosters a culture of visual consumption, a culture where images and bodies are interchangeable with words; a culture where one's body or the images of one's body becomes the dominant marker of individual identity, as well as fostering a "commodity body" (Massumi, 1992, p. 129) that can be easily consumed by others.

This investment in visual culture by these apps is not a negative phenomenon inherently. However, as these apps are encouraging individuals to come out with more desirable images of themselves indirectly, this is where it takes a negative turn. Applying Mowlabocus' (2010) earlier logic of the pornography representation of self in these digital gay spaces, to attract gazes from others, one must learn how to objectify themselves;

however, this objectification is relying too heavily on westernised notion of a pornographic body, as well as fitting into the hegemonic masculinity. It is evident on these platforms that users are "adopting the iconographic conventions of advertising and self-branding" (David and Cambre, 2016, p. 4), which in this case, the conventional images of gay pornographic bodies as well as a hegemonic masculine body. If we take a step back and ponder upon gay pornographic images of the male body, it is not difficult at all to imagine the same rhetoric that appear over the years: muscular, toned, large penis as well as the most crucial element: White. This is arguably what constitute the most sought after hegemonic masculinity in the gay community. If we deduce the logic further, to be able to subject oneself to appear to be attractive by following the recipe of this specific pornographic representation, the subject must follow these elements to attract. The press kits released by these three companies also follow similar elements (put in press kits), as their desired users are mostly White, toned, and presumably, have larger genitalia than an average person. Of course, this is echoing to Mowlabocus' framework of Cybercarnality as well as Campbell's (2004) theory of (dis)embodiment. The obsession with translating an authentic offline and yet the pornographic body is showing itself vividly on these apps.

In many ways, this preoccupation of projecting the ultimate hegemonic masculinity is amplified by these apps in a never seen before scale. It also situates western gay masculinity firmly on the top of the unspoken desire hierarchy within the gay community, which is unreachable for all other non-White gay men. To understand how western gay masculinity operates, we need to know the existing different tiers/types of mainstream western masculinity. Looking at Connell's (1995) model of masculinity, there are four tiers/types of masculinities that are always present at any given time in a society. Situated at the top of the tier is the hegemonic masculinity that is deemed as the most sought-after type of masculinity, and in relation to this, other tiers of masculinities follow: 'complicit masculinity', 'subordinate masculinity', and 'marginalised masculinity'. These other tiers of masculinities are created as a mean of distinction from the popular hegemonic masculinity. Those who are deprived of power because of their social position (class, ethnicity, education, sexual orientations and so on) often fall outside of the hegemonic masculinity. In other words, the hegemonic masculinity is a highly racialised notion, mostly applicable to gay White men (Connell, 1995). These tiers of masculinities can overlap as well; this means that hegemonic masculinity not only exist in the society at large, but it can also be present in the gay community by way of mirroring. In other words, the existing tiers of masculinities that Connell has pointed out occupy similar structure and hierarchy within the local gay community.

Meanwhile, often occupying and negotiating from their position of being the marginalised masculinity, gay culture has gone through different stages to construct and justify their position of masculinity. From moving away from effeminacy, to establishing a hypermasculine gay culture that is centred on gym culture and body image, the "masculinisation of the gay man" (Kong, 2009, p. 85) is an attempt to break free from the lower tier of being the subordinated masculinity. This process of hypermasculinising the gay self is focused entirely on the body, by glorifying and worshipping the muscly, toned, and ultimate body (Forrest, 1994; Gough, 1989; Humphries, 1985; Segal, 1990). As Connell (1995) points out, the body, whether gay or straight, has always been a significant site where one's masculinity can be measured and justified. Connell also asserts that the hegemonic masculine body is a product of social processes, where the standards of masculinity often change with time, place, power, as well as cultures. The process of the masculinisation of the gay man is most prominent from 1980s western gay pornography and onwards. Featuring gay porn stars that are extremely muscly and stereotypically macho in the standards of western masculinity, where the trope of an ultimate gay macho man is created and adopted by the gay community. They also become the standard in which desire and beauty are measured against.

Under such an immense influenced of the gay pornography tropes, gay Asian migrants are falling into the bottom of the hierarchy desire as their representation is often absent or stereotypically powerless in these representations. Furthermore, Richard Fung (2005) argues that the representation of gay Asian men in recent gay pornography is often centred on gay Asian men as powerless, victimised, and often the one being penetrated by the hypermasculinised White men. This symbolic representation renders gay Asian men as the effeminate 'other' where gay White men can exert their power on, as well as reaffirming their position as the marginalised masculinity that is due to their ethnicity.

Aside from the obvious cybercarnality, the notion of cyber-surveillance is also always readily identifiable within all three of these apps. This is evident through how users are increasingly adopting similar format of visual representation of themselves to signify specific desires. This is due to if one does not follow the generic representation that are constantly maintain and survey by other users, they will fail to attract others, which are also caught in this vicious cycle of beauty standards. This form of cyber surveillance is also a self-maintain one; the apps developers never interfere with how their users should look like directly. Instead, they rely on the apps' communal effort to patrol users' desirability. Of course, this consensus of what constitute as a desirable gay men is largely dependent on the cultural attitude of the 'gay community'. This forms another symbiotic relationship between the community and the apps, where the beauty standards of the community feed into the

ways in which users represent themselves on these apps, and these apps help maintaining these standards by popularising them.

Without going too much into the user-generated content in this chapter, the point that I am reinforcing here is that the wider cultural obsession with visual and images in our current social climate has replicated itself into the apps' interface, and it is heavily reliant on westernised notion of desirability. In turn, the interface of these apps is also shaping the way we see ourselves within such spaces, thus changing the way we can or cannot represent ourselves in a certain way. This visual-oriented interface design is a cultural product of our times, and it also shapes what we value the most when it comes to online dating and hookups. In saying so, having more visual and images are not intrinsically negative, but it does indirectly create a detrimental impact on gay Asian migrant users when it dictates which bodies are fit for consumption. This resonates with my central argument as this part of the function of the interface is to legitimise a particular version of sexual citizenship; a sexual citizenship that gay Asian migrants are finding it difficult partake in as the standards of what constitute a legitimate sexual citizen in New Zealand hinges too much on the Eurocentric elements of identities.

3.3. Digital (dis)embodiment

The emergence of the internet once promised a platform of equal access and freedom of identity expression. Some go as far as to say that the cyberspace liberates individuals from social markers and positions. Some of the more popular theory includes the embodiment theory: if our bodies are not visible in the virtual space, there will be no issue with racism, as we cannot see the visible race and ethnicity. Other scholars have rebutted such an argument as ignoring the larger issue. Moreover, the increasing requirement of a full and authentic embodiment of online identities on these applications is creating a new way to represent our identity. In addition, never in the history of online dating and hookups have our carnal bodies become so prominent and closely related to our representation online. This framework is crucial because these apps are increasingly rejecting the disembodiment of our carnal body, as it serves a very important function: verification and filtration of ethnic bodies.

In contrary to the current gay dating apps, previous popular dichotomy posit these online spheres as a form of escapism from real world 'problems', such as oppression and alienation (Mowlabocus, 2010). This dichotomy is an attempt to draw a fine line between what is the real and the virtual, online and offline. The popular argument arising from this body of argument reproduces problematic claims such as that the online world are

completely separated from the offline reality, and these two spheres remain as finely separated spaces that do not cross over. In relation to gay mobile dating apps and gay dating websites, there is a popular presumption that gay online spaces are where users create a virtual representation of themselves completely detached from any real life signifiers of their offline identities. This particular perspective of online disembodiment also implies an individual's online identity representation has no real life consequences, references, or impacts. This detachment between online and offline practices is best illustrated in what Campbell argues as the 'disembodiment thesis' (Campbell, 2004). Scholars who supported this thesis saw "cyberspace as a sovereign realm, distinct from and unaffected by the cultural, political, and economic forces shaping the mundane world we inhibit" (Campbell, 2004, p. 11). Campbell argues that the demarcation between online and offline world presupposes a certain binary logic:

> if the physical world is real, then cyberspace must be virtual and therefore something other than real; if the body is present in the physical world, then the body must be absent in the virtual world; If oppressive social constructs […] are based on the body, then when the body is absent these constructs must also be absent. (p. 11-12)

It is precisely a view like this that produces a polarised view of the cyberspace. For instance, the early celebratory attitude of cyberfeminists on the liberating potential of the internet rests its argument on the premise that the cyberspace is a virtual place free from patriarchal oppression because it is not the physical world plagued with patriarchal problems (Campbell, 2004). A simplistic understanding of the online world has failed to take into consideration how online and offline world blend into each other, informing each other's' structures, experience, and practices (Campbell, 2004). These types of argument have also failed to recognised that technologies are created to reflect our cultural practices, and they are shaped by larger cultural influence (Baym, 2010). In other words, we create certain technologies to reflect on our current social practices, and the technology also shapes the way we practice these social interactions. For instance, the invention of mobile phone reflects our increasing mobility, and the mobile phone subsequently changes the way we interact with the people and the world around us.

The Disembodiment thesis becomes rather redundant and particularly insignificant when it comes to the discussion on gay male cyberspace. Gay man's digital culture "has always had an intense relationship with other spheres of gay male life, and that this has often stood in opposition to assumptions and ideas of cyberculture propagated within mainstream academic commentary" (Mowlabocus, 2010, p. 2). For instance,

the virtualisation of the previous form of gay cultural practice such as cruising to what we currently term as 'cybercruising' on gay mobile dating applications is a crucial vantage point to recognising that this gay digital technology is not born out of a vacuum nor separated from the reality (Mowlabocus, 2010). The act of cyber cruising is a virtual extension of the previous form of physical cruising, and this age-old practice precisely informs it (Mowlabocus, 2010). Therefore, gay mobile dating apps are not a brand new territory, as they are very much entrenched with the historical reality of the gay male's subculture of cruising. The other factor to consider in the deep entrenchment between these mobile dating applications and its reference to other aspects of gay male subculture is the heavy emphasis on gay pornography. The explicit pictures containing torsos and genitalia on these gay dating mobile applications are a prominent feature and attraction. This constant reference to torso and genitalia (the body) is due to "gay male culture['s] reli[ance] on the body of the user as a point of reference within its digital interactions and virtual spaces" (Mowlabocus, 2010, p. 13). Furthermore, "in contrast to the historical (and overwhelmingly heterosexual) perception of virtual realities being non-corporeal, gay men's digital culture has long been preoccupied with the re-emergence, re-imagining and re-evaluating of gay male corporeality (Mowlabocus, 2010, p. 60). Specifically gay mobile dating apps, the bodies that occupy these virtual spaces are often indispensable and are crucial as a token of exchange between users. The bodies in these applications are the currency: to exchange, to rate, to locate, and to identify desires. As Arroyo (2016) has observed:

> A large part of one's shared public internet persona must include the exchange of one's nude image, whether that be through sending pictures through Grindr, Bear411, Twitter or posting videos on Tumblr. Nude imagery is part of the currency of the gay public life and its ability to be exchanged is an essential part of the currency of the gay public life, and its ability to be exchanged is an essential part of what can turn most any public place into an active pornographic space (p.83).

This strong link between the physical/discursive performative gay male bodies and online interactions is an effective rebuttal to the disembodiment thesis. Pertinent to my core argument in this chapter, the encouragement of such an authentic embodiment of our offline carnal body serves as a two-fold function: first, having more authentic bodies on these apps will foster a more 'authentic' experience for their users, therefore capturing their interest for a further premium subscription. Second, it also complements the ethnic filter system where the authenticity of the embodiment can be used to clarify the users' ethnic status. In other words, the authentic embodiment becomes a two-pronged verification of the ethnic selection, since we cannot change our ethnic bodies.

There is another rather important argument that we should always bear in mind when it comes to the debate of disembodiment of online spaces. It is easy to assume, since we can represent ourselves in such an overly erotic and perverse manner, that we are then performing our identity differently online in comparison to our identity offline. I think it is crucial to remember that we are not so disembodied from our identity online. Although many scholars have argued that we actively create and construct a malleable and unrealistic identity online, thus we can easily detach from these constructed identities. In fact, rather than creating an imaginary 'new bodies' online, these mobile applications are arguably, a counterpoint to the disembodiment argument. We are in fact, translating our offline body to an online environment instead. We did not create new bodies, but we fit our bodies in specific ways to present ourselves in the online environment.

3.4. (Dis)embodying ethnicity: (in)visibility of ethnic minorities

Within these applications, each user retains similar interface design when it comes to filtration. For instance, the display of photo, age, height, weight, body type, ethnicity, relationship status, what relationship is one looking for, and one of the apps, Scruff has introduced an HIV status recently as a method of filtration as well. Another point of difference that another app, Grindr, has introduced to their filtration system is the tribe category. These filtrations (which is also part of the most important feature of the interface) are aligned with these apps' proprietors' goal of making profit; by enabling their users to choose what they like and dislike, the users will arguably have more control over their selection process, which of course, one have to pay for to enjoy the power of control. Although the other filters are equally as problematic, ethnicity becomes the focal point of this chapter as well as my research due to the unchangeable and static physical reality of it. For instance, one can easily bypass age, height, weight and body type filters by modifying the numbers, which can be difficult to clarify by other users. However, when it comes to ethnicity, in relation to the need for users to display an authentic photo of themselves, this is the only physical reality they cannot modify and lie about, as well as escape from it.

Although one could easily applaud for these apps of trying to be more racially inclusive by providing different ethnic identity for various users to select from, it is precisely this visibility of ethnicity on these platform that are enabled by these apps pushed for a more severe form of racism. According to Caluya (2006), gay Asian men and their visibility can be a double edge sword. Even though greater visibility has granted gay Asian men some degree of mainstream representation, it also becomes the pre-condition in which racism can happen. In other words, without the identification of ethnicity in a rather reductionistic fashion found within these apps, the

chances for racism to happen in these spaces might not be as high. As users are encouraged to self-identify their ethnicities, it not only raise their ethnic visibility, but also indirectly allowing themselves to be the target of racism, especially since they have voluntarily subject themselves to the confinement of these simplistic ethnic identities provided in these apps.

Lisa Nakamura (2000) argues that the ethnic drop box menu in the cyberspace often contribute to racism due to its selective nature. Tracing back to the earlier Internet technologies, such as chat rooms and forums, Kolko (2000) suggests that earlier online spaces are created to be raceless (and by raceless she meant Whiteness as the default and invisible structure) to stay 'neutral' and 'universal'. Fast-forwarding to the present, why are these apps not even bothered with their attempt to stay raceless? Instead, the introduction of a drop-box menu of ethnicities selection across all dating apps is highlighting the ethnic elements within the culture and the community. The reason behind of this can be extremely complex, but I will, nevertheless, try to unpack some of it. First, in relation to the first element that I have introduced earlier, the visual dominating nature of these apps is the display of carnality. A physical body cannot escape from social markers; instead, it is marked by different social markers to distinguish oneself from another. Recognising that the differences in social markers would promote a sense of difference and uniqueness, the apps have simplified this process by allowing users to attach ethnic markers as part of the system to promote a sense of   uniqueness. Moreover, as far as commercial interests go, these different markers can be used for capturing the increasingly diversified user markets. However, one pertinent observation should be noted; although they are trying to capture the diversifying markets, the apps' companies hardly use that as a selling point (such as multicultural experiences and so and so).

The oversimplification of ethnic selections is very problematic especially when users are offered tokenistic ethnic categories that are at best, patronising. For instance, there's the option of choosing to be an 'Asian' in the drop down menu. However, as I have argued in my earlier chapter, the term 'Asian' is far too over-encompassing, without taking into account as to the various other ethnicities included under such a huge umbrella. Aside from this issue, these all-encompassing, highly tokenistic ethnic identity markers are inducing a certain stereotypical imagination by others outside of these groups. Furthermore, ethnicity becomes a token of exchange in this situation, where the users can shop for their desires based on ethnic groupings. In this instance, ethnicity is fetishised and commodified, where it can be toggled on and off by other users.

In a way, this embodiment of one's ethnic identity through a simplistic drop down menu is often to position themselves for the consumption of others. Therefore, arguably, this ethnic selection is never about the user who selects the options, it has always been about the other users who are going to make the decision on whether to connect based on what the others have selected. Thus, this selection of ethnic 'menus' is a discursive embodiment device that is used to regulate the representation of users, which enables them to be desirable in the context of racial stereotypes.

In contrast, there are only three ways that any non-White users can use to subvert this ethnic selection in order to be seen as desirable in the mainstream desirability, without completely disembody themselves. First, despite their clearly displayed ethnicity on the profile, users can choose to perform Whiteness through their proficiency in English, or by stating that they have been in New Zealand for x amount of years, or they are born in New Zealand. This will allow them to be seen as part of the wider community, by stating that they share the same cultural values as well as consensus. To them, this performance of Whiteness or by exerting some similarity that are close to Whiteness allow them to be 'passed' as desirable. Second, while within their selection of ethnicity, they can then choose to embody a second stereotypical identity that are prescribed by these selections as a result, which is often drastically different than their actual identity. By embodying the stereotypes that are imposed on them, they are able to make themselves desirable through the skewed desirability that are based on stereotypical fantasies. For instance, one can appear to be more feminine in his profile picture in order to capture the attention of users who are seeking for 'submissive', 'feminine', and/or Asian 'bottom'.

As we could already guess, the function of this drop down menu for ethnicities is part of the filtering system that these apps thrive on. By having the script built into the selection of ethnicity by their users, the interface is used as a filtering mechanism for users to identify and erase particular ethnicities from their interface quickly. The compulsory nature of the interface to force their users to select one ethnicity allows them to enforce the filtering system embedded within these apps. This need to identify the ethnicity of its users can be traced to the trend of these gay dating apps seeking authenticity from its users. For instance, Grindr did not use to have the option of linking ones' Facebook or Instagram account, but now they do; Tinder, another predominantly heterosexual dating app is strictly asking its users to link their account with their Facebook and Instagram to use the app properly. Triangulating one's identity with various other social media profiles is a trend increasingly common across most social media apps where users are required to produce a consistent online personal narrative verifiable through their offline identity. This notion of triangulation of both online and offline identity will

be explored further in Chapter Five where I propose a new matrix to look at how an authentic identity is the new way of measuring online desirability.

This interface option of choosing one's ethnic identity compulsorily is not an inherently negative feature; after all, it does help with identifying someone's ethnic background albeit in an tokenistic way. However, the limiting choices of these categories can be potentially detrimental to certain users. These archaic grouping of ethnicities under such a vague system could revoke old imaginaries of race-relation, where Asian users are still seen as submissive Orientals; White stand for the colonial power and Middle Eastern users are seen as 'exotic'. Thus, the drop down menu is not innocent; it is not just for the users to customise their online identity, but it also further enhances the (il)legitimacy of a particular ethnicity. This ethnic selection/drop down menu prevents its users from performing any identity inconsistent with the label given. For instance, Asian users often experience rejection from White users because the latter expect Asian men to be more passive and consistent with the stereotype that comes with the 'Asian' label, and the former might not be at all, stereotypically passive. Furthermore, this ability of its users to select what they want to see within their proximity based on ethnicity is a worrying one; the ethnic filtration works like a customisable mechanism to forge your homotopia that excludes based on one's preference. As mentioned in my previous chapter, the so-called gay community is rifled with discrimination: sexism, racism, ageism and so on. These apps are only amplifying such disappointing occurrence due to the anonymity, as well as the lack of consideration for others that comes with the anonymity. The ethnic filtration mechanism of these apps is erasing the presence of other ethnicities that one does not want to see, which is impossible to happen in reality. For instance, when one is going to a gay event, they are confronted with people different from them; they will have to acknowledge the presence of these people and co-occupy that space with others. Although this might not mean that occupying the same space with different people will reduce the discrimination per se, the "acknowledgement of difference occupying the same space can be a productive form of identification" (Aunspach, 2015, p. 37). However, what these apps are doing is the opposite of creating this productive form of identification and recognition; instead, they help their users to erase these moments that could lead to a further potential understanding of differences.

3.5 Summary

As demonstrated in this chapter, these apps are discursive devices that operate with a very specific vision and computational process. All these processes are working toward building a personal homotopia populated with

westernised standards of beauty, desires, and fantasies. The walkthrough method has proven that these apps are situated and created within a wider cultural framework; this also means that these apps are reflecting our current cultural practices when it comes to hooking up online, and shapes how we date/hook up with others. In this particular instance, these apps are a critical reflection of the current state of gay male digital culture. Subsequently, the procedural rhetoric embedded within these applications   manifests itself through static rules and interface designs that mobilise its users into rigid positions. In relation to the rhetoric that these apps are producing, users are encouraged by the format and architecture of these apps to display an authentic embodiment of their offline identity on these online visual spaces. Moreover, they are to self-regulate their bodies to morph into a desirable, westernised standard of a carnal body heavily influenced by western gay pornography. This results in gay Asian migrant users losing out on the race to desirability since they are often significantly under-represented in western gay pornography, as well as mainstream LGBT media.

These apps are often underscored by a sense of choice, customisability, freedom, as well as a gay utopia where everyone is gay and therefore no judgment and discrimination. However, the architecture of these spaces is often encouraging their users to filter out the people that they dislike. The filtration mechanism is evident in the three major interface designs that I have introduced throughout the second half of this chapter. First, the visual-dominated interface serves to legitimise a particular brand of homosexuality. Intertwining with Mowlabocus'(2010) framework of Cybercarnality and the self-surveillance of the neoliberal bodies, these visual dominated design is encouraging their users to represent their desirability through a profile picture of themselves; of course, the representation of users' profile pictures on these apps are often pornogrified due to the influence and investment of the gay self to western gay pornography. Subsequently, this set up the standards and micro-culture within these apps, where one is expected to conform to these standards and hierarchy of desirability. The dependence on creating one's desirable and 'legitimate' homosexuality based on Western pornographic tropes often leaves ethnic minorities unable to participate in this hierarchy of desire due to their unchangeable skin colour, and the lack of representation of ethnic minorities in the porn industry historically. Second, the need for these apps to include an ethnic filter is not just worrisome but also detrimental to some users. The ambiguity of these ethnic selections is often misleading and inaccurate. Furthermore, the tokenistic selections of ethnic identities in these apps are problematic and reduce users into a manageable algorithm. If the ethnic selection on these apps is helping with the promotion of ethnic diversity, then it is not inherently negative; however, the ethnic selection (as per every other type of filtrations such as age, height, weight and so on) is not only there for a tokenistic identity selection, but it is mainly there to serve

the filtration mechanism of these apps. This is where I often find very troubling, as these selections are there to regulate instead of represent.

I do not think that it is fair or sufficient to say that only gay Asian migrants users are the biggest victim here; the preloaded ideology of neoliberal notion of choice allows the racism happening on these platforms masked as a form of 'personal preference'. The seemingly innocent notion of a 'preference' has been debunked by Riggs (2013) in his study of online dating website when users defend their racial selection of their partners as a form of 'personal preference'. Riggs (2013) argue that these personal preferences are often not well informed and educated by the reality of ethnicity, as most of the users' impression of certain ethnicities are still based on naive stereotypes. To tie in the logic of this chapter further, these interface designs, which are mainly based on the idea of filtration, are making these personal preferences more invisible and more justifiable to do so. Users can still choose to shout out their racist references on their public profile for everyone to see; however, with the built-in filters, users are also able to filter out the people that they might have shouted out to on their profile less publicly and more quietly. This mechanism of trying to counter publicly visible form of racism to a subtle and quiet form of racism is worrying as well.

As these apps are increasingly encouraging their users to represent their one-dimensional self through a simple profile picture and a few short lines of biography through the problematic interface, we need to think critically about how our personal preference is informed by such a limited amount of information. If a user's personal preference is created based on these highly restrictive profiles and information, they will no doubt have a rather under-informed preference. However, these apps are changing over the years as well, and some of the newer apps on the market are a good starting point to solve this problem of an under-informed personal preference based on the shallow information. For instance, Blued, a Chinese-developed gay social app, is a combination of the grid format of Grindr and the sociability of any other social media such as Facebook and Instagram. Its interface allows users to participate in group chats, forums, even broadcasting live video of themselves. Users can jot down diary and notes on their profile for other visitors to read as well. All these functions will contribute to a better understanding of not just the other users, but also their ethnic background, their beliefs, their perspectives in life and so on. The interface design of Blued is aimed at fostering a poly-channel communication with more than just one member at a time, and also to display a multi-dimensional user identity that is more than just what meets the eyes. In contrary, community fostering and communication are lacking in the Western-created gay dating apps interface designs that place too much emphasis on the pornogrified carnal bodies and too little on fostering understanding of diversity that occurs behind the picture.

Although I do acknowledge their effort of an 'ethnic selection', these are often too patronising and problematic, with a very lacklustre effort to promote cultural understanding. If these apps take pride in being the new and improved modern gayborhood and community, as well as the pioneer in championing communal unity, not only does their interface need a huge revamp to accommodate activities and affordances that display individuals in more than a one-dimensional way. They will also need to improve their understanding of the increasingly diversified and globalised gay community that we are situated in presently. An in-depth understanding of diversity will allow an interface design that will accommodate the diversity and the multi-dimensional identities that users each possess, instead of reducing them into tokenistic categories that can be detrimental.

Chapter Four

Interviews

This chapter details the experiences of eight gay Asian migrants from all walks of life in New Zealand. The participants' narratives are mostly consistent with one another, sharing similar experiences and perspectives on issues such as in-apps racism, a sense of belonging, and the difficulties of blending into the gay community as a result of their triply marginalised identity of being gay, Asian, and a migrant. This chapter is structured in a deductive format, beginning with wider trends taken from the interview findings, which are then increasingly narrowed down to examine the underlying problems. One of the most important findings in this chapter arises from the examination of how gay Asian migrants' already complex identity is further shaped by dating apps. As this chapter will show, gay Asian migrants are often in paradoxical situations, where they must leverage whatever tools they have, whether in real life or specifically on gay dating apps, in order to maintain their existence.   Gay Asian migrants are simultaneously tolerated by and disengaged from the local gay community, as they are both embraced and feared by society. However, it is also in this paradox that gay Asian migrants find their social position and power, through which they seek a way to live out their identity despite rejection, disengagement, and racism.

Among all my participants, even though they agree that New Zealand is a relatively liberal and open society in which they can express and explore their sexuality, they find it difficult to assert their brand of sexuality in the predominantly White gay community. The local gay community's emphasis on the desirability of White bodies is translated to the virtual space of these gay dating apps. As such, racism and identity politics are often a daily occurrence on these apps and have a negative impact on my participants. Moreover, as these apps are arguably a mirror of and gateway to the local gay community, the racism affects my participants' sense of belonging, since their quest to belong in a host country which they have chosen for the sake of sexual acceptance nonetheless rejects who they are as an individual. The ambiguity of this sense of belonging is also a defining pattern among all of my participants. Further effects of rejection by the local gay community can be located in the participants' own sense of justification for and internalisation of the racism they have encountered over the years on these apps. Because of such contradictions, I argue that the participants' experience of these apps as well as the apps themselves become useful tools for examining the complex racial politics and migration experience in New Zealand. As my participants continue to navigate the aloofness of the existing local gay community, and debate whether they are the victims of racism or are just being overly

sensitive, the apps anchor not only the existence of such a community, but also concretise and expose the problems that are often hard to pin down, such as implicit or even explicit racism and a highly racialised desire hierarchy. All the hidden prejudices that we are not seeing in our material life are becoming manifest in this alternative space where the gay community and racism intersect. In a way, this chapter is a companion piece to the next chapter that follows, which looks at the way gay Asian migrant users are attempting to counter racism on these apps in their own ways.

4.1. Theoretical Framework

4.1.1 Racism in gay cyberspace and cyberculture

Racism in gay cyberspace such as dating websites has been well documented over the years (Callander et al., 2012, 2016; Han, 2007; Payne, 2007; Riggs, 2013; Paul et al., 2012; Robinson, 2015), and studies indicate that gay cyberspaces are founded with Whiteness as the default value (Kolko et al., 2000). Thus these spaces structurally locate the western ideal of sexuality and beauty as the universal standard against which every non-White user is measured (Poon and Ho, 2008). Moreover, western bodies are constructed as the most desirable on these platforms. This is confirmed by studies concluding that in western countries gay men tend to privilege desire for White men and bodies (Ayres 1999; Caluya 2006; Kendall and Martino, 2006; Han 2007, 2008; Teunis, 2007; Plummer, 2008; Giwa and Greensmith, 2012). This preference for White men and bodies is also translated on these gay apps into a common standard and occurrence, directly resulting in White men holding the ultimate power in partner selection (Callander et al., 2012). This suggests that White gay men operate from a position of dominance, which mirrors the broader social-political climate that shapes how race is articulated in public discourse (Callander et al., 2012). Ultimately, in cyberspace "White men are privileged in dictating the norms of sexual desire in relation to race" (Callander et al., 2012, p. 1061). Similar to Callander et al.'s study, Payne's (2007) research on the gay dating website Gaydar indicates that hegemonic White masculinity and identities on Gaydar or in queer cyberspace more broadly are maintained by constantly negating and marginalising other identities and ethnicities. Asian men are often depicted as unable to achieve the desired and standardised gay masculinities that are required for intimacy and relationships (Payne, 2007). This cycle of having to base one's sexual capital on race and ethnicity can influence the power dynamics in individual hook-ups and choices of sexual behaviour (Paul et al., 2010). This might result in gay men of colour acting out stereotypical traits that are imposed on them by the dominant gay community if they wish to attract White men (Ayres, 1999; Chuang, 1999; Han, 2005; Kong, 2002; Nemoto et al., 2003, Poon and Ho, 2008);

such stereotypes significantly lower their power to negotiate in the sexual marketplace (Paul et al., 2010.). In a limited fashion, virtual community does allow for demarginalisation and emotional support, but gay men of colour are more likely to expose themselves to rejection, objectification, and experiences of race-based prejudice in online communities that are sexually focused than in their daily lives in the real world (Paul et al., 2010).

These spaces were once hailed as the ultimate celebration of racial inclusion and diversity because of their 'neutral' and 'universal' design, but, as Nakamura (2001, 2008) acutely argues, the structures of these spaces are influenced by race, gender, sexuality, and other social positions. The structures and architectures remind us that the design of these cyberspaces is far from neutral or inclusive. Lessig (2006) indicates that the internet is, in fact, a highly regulated space, which benefits the powerful rather than the marginalised groups in the society. Furthermore, cyberspaces are products of power and culture (Robinson, 2015; Nakamura, 2001, 2008), and they amplify social differences and inequalities beyond those of physical reality (Nakamura, 2001, 2008). The amplification of social differences and inequality on these apps is often less subtle than day-to-day discrimination. Suler (2004) argue that the online disinhibition effect allows people in cyberspace to be more explicit about their bias due to an architectural design that favours anonymity, diminished social responsibility and the ability to express one's view intensely. This could potentially explain the explicit racial bias that is publicly visible on these apps, but only to a certain extent. In my earlier chapters, I have proposed that developers of these apps are increasingly implementing the triangulation of identity. Consistent on/offline identity is often sought after by both the developers of apps as well as the users themselves; therefore, users are more likely to create an online identity that is more salient and clear than what it used to be. Hence, the disinhibition theory struggles to explain why some users can still project explicit racial prejudices when their individual information readily available, visible, and accessible by others.

4.1.2 Racism towards Asians in New Zealand and in its gay community

New Zealand's march towards multiculturalism in the last two decades has not always been smooth sailing. From the period of the 'yellow peril' to the 'greedy' Chinese international companies buying up local farms, the images of Asians being the unwelcome 'aliens' (Ip, 2003) has constituted a popular discourse in New Zealand. In his study of Asian migrants in New Zealand, Chui (2004) also argues that Asian migrants are often framed negatively by local media outlets, ranging from the 'Asian triads' to infrastructure burden that is causing strain on public health and traffic congestion. Chui also further asserts that these frames revolve around Asian

migrants being seen as unassimilable, as local media often selectively highlight the lack of English language proficiency of Asian migrants. The xenophobia towards Asians in the country has continued throughout the years, with blame for newer problems constantly attributed to the Asian community, such as the recent housing crisis in New Zealand, where Asian foreign buyers are blamed for the local housing shortage. Although multiculturalism is evident in New Zealand, with its citizenry comprising a variety of ethnicities, Leckie (2015) points out that multiculturalism does not always equate to the acceptance of diversity. In other words, we can have different ethnicities living in a country without acknowledging their contributions or positive impacts and still disagree over the value of such diversity. Although New Zealand's diplomatic relations with Asian countries are closer than ever (Chin and Richardson, 2004; Ramasamy and Cremer, 1998; Smith, 2005; Voci and Leckie, 2011), amongst the New Zealand population Asia represents a threatening powerhouse that causes fear and uncertainty for the country's future (Asia New Zealand Foundation, 2008, 2009; Brookes , 2007; Butcher, Spoonly and Trlin, 2006; Hannis, 2009; Human Rights Commission 2003, Spoonley, Macpherson and Pearson, 1991, 1996; Voci and Leckie 2011). Furthermore, the rise of transnational migration from Asia to New Zealand is tainted by assumptions about transnational migrants' lack of commitment and loyalty to local development, since they maintain strong ties with their mother nation (Ip, 2003). The term 'Asian' and 'Asia' in New Zealand is often equated with being the outsider or alien (Ip and Leckie, 2011) who struggles to blend into the traditionally assumed national identity of New Zealand. For more than 130 years, Asians have remained the "archetypal alien in New Zealand: the 'essential outsider', deemed inscrutable, unassimilable" (Ip, 2003, p. xi). The gay community in New Zealand replicates and reflects these sentiments about race relations that are embedded within the nation's attitude and narrative towards multiculturalism and treatment of the Asian population. Although the racism that is evident in the local gay community is at odds with the international gay narrative of inclusivity and diversity (Callander et al., 2012), it is nonetheless consistent with the discourse of racism that is found in New Zealand.

4.2. Method

The researcher created flyers that were circulated around the university's student commons, as well as posting recruitment notice on popular notice boards all around the campus. Additionally, digital version of recruitment notice was created and posted onto Auckland's gay Asian Facebook group, EquAsian to attract potential participants. Two participants were recruited from the recruitment notice posted around the campus; two participants were recruited from the EquAsian Facebook group, and the rest of the four participants were referred by the two participants from the Facebook group. Online recruitment on these apps had been

considered; however, as stated in the terms and conditions of these three apps, any forms of studies conducted on the users of these apps, as well as using the platforms to advertise for services are strictly prohibited. Therefore this research relies on the traditional snowballing recruitment method to source potential participants to avoid potential legal ramification. The backgrounds of the participants varied. These eight participants come from various countries. Three of them are originally from China, and the other five participants are from Thailand, Taiwan, Japan, Indonesia, and India. Their age ranges between 20 and 46, and they are users of these three apps. Only two participants emigrated to New Zealand when they were young (one emigrated as a child with his family, and one came here to study in high school), and the other participants emigrated when they were in their adulthood (emigrated for employment opportunities or to pursue tertiary education).

As mentioned in the methodology section in the Introduction chapter, interviews were semi-structured and guided by three major components, framed as a series of open-ended questions: first, the background of the participants; second, their sexual identity in relation to the local gay community; third, their usage and experience of these apps. Each interviews were conducted in-person, with an average of 60 minutes per interview. Participants were given the Participants Information Sheet and Consent form before the interview commence, and written consent was obtained from all the participants. The possibility of online interviews on these apps via their chat function had been considered, but again, it is against the platforms' rules and regulations. Furthermore, for research of such a sensitive nature, in-person interviews are a sincere way for the researcher to demonstrate compassion and respect for the interviewees. The interviews were recorded on a digital recorder with the permission from participants; recordings were encrypted and transcribed verbatim. The transcription had been checked thoroughly for consistency and subjected to thematic analysis. The researcher read the transcripts for a few times to identity recurring patterns and themes in participants' narratives. These themes were noted in the research journal. Through repeated reading and identifying the transcripts, four themes are refined and identified as illustrated in the findings below.

4.3 Findings:

4.3.1. New Zealand as a better environment for acceptance of sexuality and generally in comparison to immigrants' home country.

As Sullivan (1995) suggests in his study on gay Asian immigrants in Australia, a liberal and accepting environment is important for sexual migrants in their decision to migrate. Sexual migrants are able to express their sexuality and avoid "social restrictions and legal sanctions against homosexual practice in some countries of origin" (Sullivan, 1995, p. 15). This part of my findings is similar to Sullivan's study, as my participants were all looking to embrace a fuller life without any sanctions as well as having a better level of acceptance. Sullivan also points out that general acceptance of one's sexuality and identity is one of the "most satisfying aspects of settlement" (p. 15) for sexual migrants. Participants' claims of New Zealand being a liberal and accepting country towards LGBT individuals are unsurprising. Given the country's progressive political stance, from decriminalising homosexual activity to legalising same-sex marriage, the open attitude towards LGBT rights and community was a welcome change for the participants in comparison to their home country. They claimed to be finding better acceptance from New Zealand society as a whole, although, at this stage of the interview, participants had yet to indicate the attitude of the local gay community towards their sexuality. The idea of New Zealand as a better place for the participants' wellbeing was consistent despite the different demographic backgrounds of the participants. As the interview progressed, participants began to question this sense of acceptance when the gay community was involved. There were multiple contradictions and ironies as my participants tried to decide whether they were fully embraced and accepted by their host country once the gay community was thrown into the mix. In a way, the sense of New Zealand being an accepting host country can be distilled into two pathways for the participants; on a general day-to-day basis, they felt that their sexuality is accepted by the wider society, but, as the interview progressed, most participants revealed that the local gay community tends to contrast with the overall accepting attitude of 'mainstream' New Zealand society towards their sexuality.

4.3.2 .Freedom to express one's sexuality

Most participants stated that New Zealand is an open country in comparison to their home country because they can express their sexuality without worrying about judgement and consequences. As sexual migrants, the freedom of being able to express and present their sexuality as well as being recognised legally and socially are important to them. The level of acceptance towards LGBT identity was often stated to be an attractive attribute of New Zealand:

> Just the level of acceptance I think. And the fact that, we could get into a civil union to make our relationship real. It was nice to walk about and not worry about who's gonna notice, or what people are

gonna say or whatever. Not just because it's a whole new country and we don't know anyone here, but just generally, you could make a reservation for two at a restaurant and it's no big deal. Just little things like that. Back home you could still go out, but you have to pretend to be friends, and can't do a lot of things without sort of raising a few eyebrows. (A)

Back home it's harder to build a life together. I mean it's not like you get thrown in jail or lynched or anything, not as severe as that. But there's not enough acceptance, not that kind of acceptance you have here (…) So we're like let's move to NZ. It's all open and they have all the structure in place to protect gay people legally. (A)

New Zealand is much better than Japan in terms of being gay and different. At least people don't look down on you, and they are ok with you being gay. In Japan, people frown on you and they are not very accepting of that. (S)

Part of the reason why I migrated here in the first place is because of my sexuality. Like my parents are aware of what I am, especially my Mom, she decided to send me off to NZ, she thinks it's better for me here, because I can be who I am, and I can have a normal life. (X)

It's illegal to be [an] atheist there, and you will be jailed for that. So, considering how pervasive religion is there, it's not as bad as like the middle east, but it's pretty bad to be LGBT there. Yeah I mean the best way to look at it is that you are still being seen as a human here in NZ, so...that's how I look at it. (J)

One of the most striking patterns to arise from these claims is the level of tolerance or acceptance in New Zealand experienced by the participants towards LGBT issues and sexuality. These claims also solidify the fact that sexual migrants emigrate because of their sexuality, on top of other factors like financial security, better living environment and so on. All participants agreed that ,from a legal standpoint, LGBT individuals are well protected and treated equally, and the liberal environment allows them live out their sexuality. What we should focus on, though, is the fact that the participants were talking specifically about how the legal system tolerates them, rather than about the society and the local gay community embracing them as one of their own. This is the first paradoxical situation that gay Asian migrants find themselves in, where they feel protected but lack a sense of being embraced by the local (gay) community.

In a way, this paradoxical relationship between the statutes of the liberal country and the local (gay) community is one of the most defining features of many gay Asian migrants' experience. For instance, New Zealand as a

country embraces Asian migrants as the model minority but is still cautious about Asian migrants being unassimilable (see Ip); the country accepts homosexuality but the gay community is still marginalised to a certain extent (consider issues such as gay couples being unable to adopt children due to their sexuality and gay men being unable to donate blood without discrimination). Most importantly, when it comes to the gay community, gay Asian migrants are tolerated by the gay community but discriminated against by many of its members. This multi-tiered paradoxical situation puts gay Asian migrants in a peculiar position: they are both insiders and outsiders simultaneously, unable to achieve full integration like others. The key to finding a sense of belonging for gay Asian migrants is to be engaged by and to engage with the local gay community. However, as indicated by participants, being tolerated by the country but disengaged from or even discriminated against by the local gay community makes it difficult for them to occupy a place in the community at any level. This feeling of being tolerated but also side-lined by both the country and the local gay community is further exemplified when the participants were asked about their sense of belonging.

4.3.3. The ambiguous sense of belonging

As the previous section has indicated, participants generally found New Zealand to be a better country in terms of their sexual citizenship as well as finding a better sense of acceptance in comparison to their home country. However, uncertainty and division emerged when the participants were asked about their sense of belonging. Two of the participants expressed a strong sense of belonging, but the rest had little sense of belonging when it came to the local gay community. Participants' sense of belonging was also influenced by their migrant history. This means that participants who immigrated to New Zealand when they were much younger tended to have a better sense of belonging than newer immigrants. Although most of the participants began by saying they felt a good sense of belonging, this changed throughout the course of the interview when their relation to the local gay community was examined. In other words, as discussed in the previous section, participants felt tolerated and had a good sense of belonging within the wider New Zealand society, but were unable to replicate the same feeling when it came to their position in and relation to the local gay community. Although finding a sense of belonging within the local gay community does not guarantee better settlement in a new country, it does affect how one is able to express their sexuality and perform their identity.

For instance, K's and F's statements illustrate this tension between the society and the local gay community:

I feel a strong sense of belonging. I feel that people accept what I look like. The people here listen to my opinion in terms of work. If we talk about the gay community, I can feel excluded because of my age and my race. (K)

I do feel some degree of belonging here with some community, like the LGBT (Asian) community. Mostly because I only interact with Asian LGBT community just like EquAsian and the Aids Foundation. Aside from that, I don't have a lot of Caucasian gay friends or LGBT friends. I don't feel like I belong in the Caucasian LGBT community though. I do feel like being excluded by the LGBT community sometimes because I am Asian.   (F)

The statement from K demonstrates the paradoxical relation between New Zealand society and the gay community, and the second statement from F shows that the community is divided by ethnic differences. K's feeling of exclusion within the gay community arose from his age and his ethnicity, the two traits on the basis of which he did not feel discriminated against in the wider New Zealand society. In relation to that, F's statement shows that the community is excluding him because of his ethnicity. Both statements illustrate the two different standards and levels of acceptance in New Zealand between the country as a whole and the local gay community. Just because one is tolerated by the society does not mean one will automatically receive similar treatment from the gay community. In turn, this makes finding a sense of belonging a difficult and complex process for gay Asian migrants, as they struggle to understand why the local gay community struggles to embrace them as indicated by the racism on the dating apps.

In a similar fashion, F reported no difficulty in terms of integrating into New Zealand in general, but, as his statement makes clear, he found it difficult to blend into the largely White, local gay community. According to F's account, the community is split into different cliques based on ethnicity. While it is common for a community to have cliques, F's account implies that the Asian gay and hegemonic gay communities rarely interact or cross paths with each other, and they are solely distinguished by ethnicities. F's experience and K's account are similar in that they agree that the expectations and narratives of the White ('Caucasian' in F's account) gay community do not include diverse ethnicities. While the local gay community prides itself on being inclusive and friendly towards everyone, participants felt that the ethnicity basis of belonging limits them to similar ethnic cliques that are often marginalised by the ethnocentric gay community.

4.3.4. Personal preference

Although the participants have all experienced racism on these apps in one way or another, some of them (both the research participants and the users that they have encountered on these apps) reduce the issue of overt racism and race-based choices into merely a 'personal preference'. Participants all agreed that they encounter the expression of personal preference only on these apps and are never confronted by this notion in their day-to-day lives. This phenomenon is exclusive to most online dating platforms, where 'personal preference' is widely used by users to reject others. In this specific instance, the use of the expression 'personal preference' often directly refers to preference for one ethnicity over another, and it has nothing to do with one's personality or interests. Participants expressed their discomfort with seeing profiles that contain racial preferences, particularly when it directly works against their own interest. However, in addition to a general sense of helplessness and their inability to prevent or to challenge these racial prejudices on these apps, they tended to justify someone's race-based partner selection as nothing more than just personal preference. Some participants also acknowledged their own preferences when it comes to choosing whom to talk to on apps.

For instance, A illustrates this process of rationalising racism by downplaying it to a mere personal preference:

> I feel like maybe it is a preference. Maybe it's wrong for me to demand that they accept everyone or everybody. It all again comes down to decency you know. Like why would you…what if you did find an Indian or Asian person and you got along with them. Are you gonna sort of push them away because of what you wrote on your profile? Meanwhile, you are sort of locking out this whole group of potential matches. If that works for you oh well… its rude for sure. I think it's a way…. like how some people start with the whole thing of 'I am not racist' but whatever they say next will be offensive. Maybe it's really a preference. Fine on you. I am not going to change how you think or how you feel.   (A)

A acknowledges reflexively that the so-called racial preference is racist in nature, but it is easier for him to understand the phenomenon when he rationalises it as a preference. He feels uncomfortable seeing such preferences articulated publicly, but he also thinks that there is nothing he can do to change someone's 'preference'.

Interestingly, A also talks about the wider cultural influences that might have informed his own preference along the way, which sums up the difficulty of distinguishing between individual desire and socio-cultural influence when navigating this preference phenomenon:

> Sometimes when I try to think for them and put myself into their shoes, would I also reject another Indian? Is it that kind of …would I… could I become racist towards other races? But just because the way I have been conditioned.. maybe because of all the porn I have watched.. just experience in a predominantly White country, I don't know if that sort of bend my brain in such a way that I consciously start rejecting other Asians or other Indians. And I become blind to my own race. There is also the whole fetish argument there. There are people who only prefer Asian or Indians. I don't know. it's complicated.   (A)

A suggests that his preferences could be informed by wider social and cultural influences, and being in a 'western' country, he feels as if his choices and his standards of beauty are also influenced by the host country and possibly by the implicitly western-centric porn he has watched. This recalls my earlier argument of how western gay pornography has conditioned gay men and their community to perceive desirability as something that can only be found on gay White men. In a important way, A's statement exposes the fact that an individual's preference is connected to his social position and specific cultural and political environment, so much so that he wonders whether he has become "blind to [his] own race". Moreover, the fact that A is trying to justify others' race-based preferences by trying to 'put [himself] into their shoes' shows just how pervasive this notion is. It also highlight the difficulties for individuals to untangle a 'personal' preference from its racist nature. In A's statement, we can also see not only how these preferences tend to privilege gay White men, but most importantly, that these subjective preferences informed by wider cultural attitudes also render gay Asian migrants as undesirable. This then creates an environment where gay Asian men view each other as undesirable, thus producing a fierce competition amongst gay Asian migrants to compete for gay White men as potential partners.

On the other hand, S has a strong objection towards such a phenomenon, and struggles to accept the ideology of a so-called personal preference:

> Personal preference is when you choose what to eat, like what you like to eat and what you don't. That I agree is personal preference. You don't choose people like you choose your favourite food, do you?

In saying that, Asian people get reduced into food anyway, like no rice no curry and what not, so I guess it makes it easier to claim preference because to them, we are like food.   (S)

S's statement reflects the contested and constructed nature of the phenomenon of personal preference. By comparing people to food, he demonstrates the extent to which 'personal preferences' appears to be about taste but is actually informed by ideologies. Furthermore, his statement reveals how the local gay community often reduces gay men of colour to the stereotypical food that represents an ethnic group, which then appears to justify the use of a 'personal preference' as an excuse of having a different taste in different food. In this way, the users who fall back on personal preference can escape from the accusation of being racist because they just happen to have a different taste.

Here we can see a distinctive pattern of attaching personal preference to two different elements: personal preference is something that is deeply personal and unrelated to anyone 'personally'; personal preference is about having a different taste, one that is highly subjective and incontestable. The point of using 'personal preference' as an excuse for rejection is that it is highly effective, as others cannot contest what appears to be a highly personalised matter.

Although the person who makes such a statement may hope it will be inoffensive by pinpointing it to their own preference, the rejected audience that comes across these statements is often appalled and takes it very personally. K's quote also exposes the problematic logic behind such personal preference, where people are reduced to a commodity weighed according to one's free choice, which is common in neoliberal discourse. The negative effect is amplified by the fact that these apps reduce their users to categorisable types and present them as packaged information for other users to consume, whereby users are typically seen as 'products' that are offered by these apps. Furthermore, when gay Asian migrant/ethnic users are confronted by 'personal preferences' that contain implicit racial undertones , their self-justifications are consistent with these apps' vision of commodifying individuality: not every 'product' will fit everyone and that is absolutely fine. This makes interrogating the notion of a 'personal preference' very difficult, as it is often masked by the neoliberal notion of 'choice'. In other words, one cannot easily tell another user that their choice of not wanting to engage with individuals from other ethnicities is a wrong one because it is, as a matter of fact, their neoliberal right to choose.

4.3.5. Participants' own personal preference

Although some participants denounce the act of personal preference as being racist and discriminatory on these apps, other participants acknowledge their own personal preferences when it comes to dating apps. This forms a rather intriguing irony, since the participants who are actively rejecting this claim of personal preference are sometimes actually practising it themselves. However, the participants who practise it stated that it mostly comes in a form of unconscious bias and they will not put it onto their profile to elicit responses.

> I do have a preference, I like bears. I like someone with facial hair [...]you don't have to be younger than me but you have to look older than me.. I never date Asian. I never try. I don't know.. I date [a] Black [person] and I date [a] White [person] but no(t) Asian. I won't put my preference on my profile because I like to talk to everyone. We can be friends. (K)

> I will be lying if I [say I] have no preference; I do. But even if I tell people that I have a preference or make it obvious on my profile, no one will care because no one will see it. You know what I mean? Like if I am sending my preference to the public there has to be a public for it to work. When say my profile is being filtered or blocked constantly or people think I am ugly because of the White community standard, then it doesn't matter if I have a preference, does it? People hardly want to visit my profile. (K)

> I think it's all [about] personal preference at the end of the day. It's like food, maybe someone just doesn't like beef you know. I don't eat beef but you keep bringing me beef, isn't that weird? I mean I have a lot of preference too you see. I mean age is one of my preference; I don't date someone too young. Even though I don't write that on my profile. So in terms of the racism on these apps, I know they exist, I have seen them but I am also grown to accept that and not let it affect me in anyway. I feel indifferent. I know I have prejudice too. And I also saw profiles of Asian guys saying no Asians but I still feel ok and fine.   (J)

These statements show that preferences work both ways and in a different capacity. Participants like K uses preference to justify other forms of racial discrimination by saying that he has a preference as well, which means it is fair game for other users to do the same. Although participants still feel uncomfortable at the injustice, they turn to their own prejudices and examine their own bias, which in turn douses their anger and

sense of rejection by accepting that if they have their own bias and prejudices, then it should be fair for others to have one.

The power of publicising and applying a preference is often unreachable for my participants. This is because it is those who are desired by the community that get to have a preference, presumably because they have a larger pool to choose whom to connect with based on their innate beliefs. Despite having a preference, participants like K feel as if his own preference is often redundant because other users skip through his profile, ironically, he suggests, because of their race-based preferences. Thus, even the participants who expressed their own preferences with regards to potential connections on these apps mentioned that they will never make their biases public. This can boil down to two reasons: firstly, they think it is disgraceful to publicly voice your biases; secondly, their biases and preferences will not matter even if they are public, because people are less likely to peruse their profiles. Because they are already marginalised, they lack the privilege to have a preference publicly as they have fewer options to choose from. In other words, White users' preference is more powerful and valuable than anyone else's, despite the fact that everyone has some kind of preference when it comes to sexual desire.

In summary, participants reveal their reaction to users' profiles that project overt racialised preferences firstly by recognising them as discriminatory and secondly by rationalising them as an individual's personal preference. Some of the users on these apps also state explicitly that their racialised desires stem from their personal preferences. Participants also opened up about their inability to change someone's mind when personal preference is used as an excuse for rejection. Furthermore, some participants are aware that their preference is informed by wider social, cultural, and historical discourses, and it is not something that is totally independent and divorced from any other factors. When the participants are questioned about their own preferences, they agree they have preferences but will never make them public like the more privileged users. In turn, participants think that it is acceptable for others to have preferences over partner selection because they themselves have preferences too. Although this is often frustrates their aim to be accepted wholeheartedly and openly, participants felt like it is only fair because it works both ways. Although everyone has a preference, the power of having a preference is often imbalanced; this entails whose preference is having a greater impact and whose preference is redundant and silenced. This section demonstrates that gay Asian migrants are not just the passive recipients and rejects of racial preferences; instead, it illustrates that they too, have preferences. However, their preferences are often insignificant because of their lower status in the local gay dating app scene, where their desires are systematically ignored and overlooked.

4.3.6. (App) racism

The general sense of tolerance that my participants initially reported starts to unravel when they were asked about their experiences on gay mobile apps. Racism in gay cyberspace is well documented; however, the effect of racism on immigrants that rely on these spaces (to a certain extent) to concretise their sexuality and validate their identity in a brand-new country is understudied. In this section of the interview, participants reported being discriminated against and made to feel unwelcome by their peers and members of the local gay community. Participants also agreed that racism is alive and well in New Zealand's gay community in general. Moreover, they talked about the apps and the local gay community interchangeably, which indicates one is a mirror of the other. In other words, their experience of these apps is an indication of the wider attitude of the local gay community towards race relations. This directly has an impact on their subsequent feeling of belonging as well as how they approach their sexuality. These apps also become an indirect measurement device for my participants to examine whether their presence is accepted by the local gay community. Even though participants feel accepted as a sexual immigrant in New Zealand, they all agreed that the local gay community, as reflected through gay apps, is much less accepting in comparison.

Some of the participants acknowledged either subtle or overt cues of racism from the local gay community extending beyond the apps themselves. As one of the participants observes:

> I think there is at least...outside of the apps, there's a culture almost like subtle racism (...) at the same time, just because we are in a society where Whites are the dominant, there's always just a little bit of an undercurrent of us versus them, even if it's not necessarily like explicit. (J)

Racism in daily life is often more subtle than participants' experience on these apps. When J recounted his experience of these apps, he reported finding racism there to be much more explicit and overt, especially as concentrated on one particular app, Grindr. This is related both to the particular design and practices of each app as well as to the disinhibition effect in these spaces, where the power of anonymity and the lack of social responsibility have enabled overt racism to flourish. Another participant, F, notes that racism within the local gay community and in these digital spaces denotes the existence of a hierarchy: "you have to admit that there is some kind of hierarchy within this community. So they will think it's quite low to be friends with an Asian person". F's statement illustrates that gay Asian men, aside from their identity as immigrants, are often situated

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in the lower tier of the desire hierarchy in New Zealand, so much so that he thinks that even a hand of friendship is difficult to obtain, let alone a romantic or sexual relationship:

> I don't make any friends through these apps. Because everyone's is looking for different things. And even when an Asian guy is saying looking [for] friend[s] on their profile, they are most like[ly] saying they want a Caucasian friend. And the Caucasian people also don't want to make friends with Asian people.   (F)

Although the race-based choices are often overt, the feeling of discrimination expressed by participants can be hard to pin down. To the extent that the participants experienced this subjective feeling of being discriminated against, however, it was anchored in and concretised by their experience on gay dating apps, which in turn supports their claims that racism is alive and well in the gay community, as these apps are arguably an extension of the local gay community. A's account of his experience of racism on these apps elucidates the way that such discrimination often works:

> So this actually happens to this guy I was chatting to, once I told him I am from India, he's like it's ok…and stopped talking to me after. It didn't get very far after I told him I was from India, but up until then, it was ok, like there was banter and whatever going on, like oh your picture is hot. Ultimately the conversations always come up to like "where are you from?" And then when I told them I was from India it was all ended before I knew it.   (A)

A's experience of having to disclose his immigrant status/country of origin to other users to only see them exit from the conversation is common and expected in his experience of these apps. Immigrants are often tasked with answering the question of their origins, even though the situation does not warrant them to do so. From the migrants' perspective, being asked where they are originally from can be taken as a form of greeting, or even a sign of other users wanting to know more about their background; what they often overlook, however, is the fact that questions about their origins serve as a pre-emptive base for others to disengage with them. This is certainly the case in A's experience, where his immigrant background became the source of rejection, or at least the basis on which others determined their decision about maintaining a connection.

Most of the participants cited Grindr as the app where they encountered frequent racism. The other two apps, Jack'd and Blued, were typically seen as more tolerant and less racist by my participants. Participants claimed

that this was mainly due to the demographic of these apps, since Grindr has more White users, and Jack'd and Blued have more Asian or Asian-friendly users (the latter term normally refers to gay White men who are looking for Asian partners). This finding is also consistent, as I will discuss later, with the problem of racism being so severe on Grindr that Grindr became the only app in the market to launch an anti-racism social campaign on its platform to tackle the problem.

Two participants explicitly recounted their experience and their view of Grindr, validating the instances of volatile racism to be found there. F dislikes Grindr specifically because the nature of the app caters towards sexual connection rather than networking relations, which is what he would have wanted as a relatively new immigrant to New Zealand:

> I have a negative experience with Grindr because I was using it when I first came to NZ. I use it to make friends but people think that is ridiculous (people want sex I suppose). I think Grindr is only for a hookup here in NZ, so my purpose of looking for friends is not really working. I did try the whole hookup thing but I didn't enjoy it as much and it is meaningless, so I didn't bother after that. Hooking up is hard too because all they want is everything but Asian.   (F)

In F's narrative, his intention of making new friends on Grindr has been unsuccessful, although he acknowledges that he occasionally sought out the sexual connection that is best supported by Grindr. However, he found making sexual connections difficult because his identity as an Asian man has rendered him undesirable in the hierarchy. For F, being able to establish a network within the gay community is important to him as a new migrant; however, his experience of Grindr quickly turned into a troubled journey as he often experienced rejection because of his ethnicity. The important thing that F's statement points out is the process of conformity that migrant users undertake when attempting to navigate these apps. His initial attempt at networking through Grindr failed because of the nature of the app, which is typically seen as being used for casual sex (see Chapter Five on the different types of connections that these apps foster). He then conformed to what the app and its users expect him to do: seek out casual sex. However, his attempt at finding casual sex partners failed as well because of his ethnicity. In contrast to Grindr, F finds Jack'd to be more friendly:

> Jack'd is for hookup too. The difference [between Grindr and Jack'd] is most users are from an Asian background or Asian friendly background. Unlike Grindr, you must have noticed that there are lots of

people put up like 'no Asian thank you' on their profile. Jack'd doesn't really have that. Or not that much because I definitely noticed that Jack'd users are Asian people.   (F)

The different demographics of these apps \have an impact on the type of interaction and experience a user will encounter. For instance, Jack'd is a more popular app among gay Asian men than Grindr because it is associated by users with a lower chance of experiencing racism directed at gay Asian men. F's reasoning about why there is significantly less racism on Jack'd is based on his own observation that Jack'd caters for gay Asian men to connect with other gay Asian men, as well as for anyone who is non-Asian but seeking gay Asian men. This resonates with Chapter Five of this thesis, which shows that Jack'd is mostly populated with Asian users and there is very little overt racism against gay Asian migrants in comparison to Grindr. In a way, both Jack'd and Blued act like a refuge from the racism that participants experienced on Grindr. When they need to be in a space that has less racism, they go to Jack'd and Blued for easier networking opportunities. One participant, A, chose not to use Grindr because of its negative reputation, but the rest of the participants are choosing to use Grindr on the basis of a similar line of reasoning: it is the most popular app in New Zealand, and it is also the best app to meet locals and establish a connection with them (presumably White locals). As a gay Asian migrant, establishing local connections is a very important step to secure their sense of belonging. This also explains the risk-taking despite knowing the reputation of Grindr. Although my participants agreed that they are more than happy to befriend other gay Asian men, they also acknowledged that they are seeking gay White men because it is a new experience for them. This is consistent with Castaneda's (2000) findings that sexual migrants often seek a new experience and new type of connections when they migrate. This also provides a second layer of explanation as to why the competition among gay Asian men for gay White men is fierce: they not only elevate their status in the local gay community by having a White partner, but they are also trying something new – an interracial relationship that is not easily found in their countries of origins.

4.3.7. No Asian, no Indian

I think these things [dating apps] doesn't help my self-esteem; …when you read someone's profile …, this guy looks cool, his profile is great, we have similar hobbies and what not. And when you get to the bottom of the profile, it just says no Asian, no Indians.   (L)

As illustrated by the quote above, participants reported on seeing user profiles that state specific racial preferences and exclusions. Most of this comes in the form of rejecting certain ethnicities (no this, no that), which clearly displays racist traits. All of the participants encountered user profiles that state 'no Asian and no Indian' (as well as other ethnicities) at some point during their experience with these apps. All of the research participants stated that they are used to seeing such profiles, which suggests that this phenomenon is common among these apps, although some apps have fewer such profiles than others. For instance, X mentions,

> Some people just say like no Asians, no blacks, no browns and whatever on these apps …listing it out there on your profile I don't think that's a good thing. Cause … just means you are not open-minded enough … listing the thing out there, it influences other people. Making people feel unwelcome.   (X)

The occurrence of racism on these platforms in the form of a publicly visible statement is upsetting but understood by the participants as part of the cyberculture that is pertinent to these apps. Even though the participants agree on the detrimental effect on themselves and others, they also express their inability to fight back. This inability has pushed some participants to go so far as to justify these racist instances as a matter of 'personal preference' which they cannot contest, since personal choices are about taste, as discussed in the previous section. However, as X notes in his account, displaying problematic messages on one's profile can have a negative influence on other people and jeopardise gay Asian migrants' settlement in their new host country as they feel unwelcome. At the same time, J's nonchalant attitude towards racism on apps also illustrates a growing resilience as well as the sense of helplessness towards these practices:

> I mean there are always some people who are doing that explicitly [racist messages] on these apps, the apps are just more explicit in terms of racism. But I am just like who cares? Not like you can do much to it.   (J)

For some of my participants, they feel as if the users on these apps are only looking for White men to connect with. For instance, S believes that the people on these apps are 'fake' in terms of hiding their racial prejudices in real life, whereas their racism can be quite overt in the apps:

> I mean on the outside everyone is nice but when you get into the app it's a whole different world. This guy you saw on the street might smile at you, talk nicely to you or super attractive, but when you see

the same person on an app, when they say no Asian no Indian and what not, it's like omg. What a fake

person. There are quite a few profiles on Grindr they say those racist things. Not so much on the other

one [Blued and Jack'd]. They seem to only want a White guy and no Asian or Indian guy. I had a hard

time finding people on these apps because they make me feel not welcome and wonder if I am

attractive at all.   (S)

S's experience illustrates a growing consensus among the other participants that racism is amplified on a

specific app (Grindr), grounded in the hostility of its users toward non-White users. Furthermore, low self-

esteem is created by these hostile interactions as a result. In a way, S's statement again illustrates the stark

differences between being tolerated in real life by the gay community but instantly disengaged from by the

same people when they meet online. This creates a disenfranchisement effect for my participants, who

expressed constantly second-guessing themselves in terms of whether they are actually attractive and/or

included in the gay community.

For some other participants, seeing such a message is a confirmation of rejection by the community, which

makes them disengage from the community rather than waiting for it to happen the other way around:

Some of the people on the apps says no Asian, no Thai, no Philippines, no this, no that blah blah

blah….it's kind of like [being] excluded. I won't talk to those people at all. Maybe when I am drunk I

might…haha…challenge them [on their prejudice]. (K)

K's helplessness in response to this feeling of exclusion results from seeing these profiles and emphasises the

fact that he finds it difficult to challenge or to change the situation. The only coping mechanism that he has is to

ignore these people. This is a strategy that is well-documented in Callander et al.'s (2016) study of racism on

gay dating web services, where victims of racism often disconnect from the situation by either leaving the

space or ignoring the perpetrator. K did jokingly mention that he might challenge the perpetrator, but only when

he is drunk. This also underlines the fact that confrontation would take courage and support, as the experience

can be frightening and harrowing. Instead of feeling disengaged by the gay community, K's statement

demonstrates that he actively disengage himself from the community. In a way, this helps gay Asian migrants

to take back some power of choice in this asymmetrical power distribution: they cannot choose whether to be

disengaged from by others, but they can certainly choose to disengage from others who are explicitly racist.

As a coping mechanism to avoid other users disengaging from him, K had chosen to 'test' the other users to see if he needs to disengage first:

> I see maybe 30 per cent of them will have that kind of display on their profile of no Asian and what not, but some of them won't have that on their profile. They will tell you if you ask though, or when you message them and get ignored.   (K)

Aside from navigating their way through the overt racism that is often written in a visible statement on user profiles, migrant users like K have to tread carefully with profiles that seem approachable but might contain a hidden agenda by either asking them directly about their preferences or by testing to see if they get any response back from the person. Although it is insufficient to determine someone's racial discrimination by testing their reply (or lack thereof), K's statement illustrates the minefield he has to tread to avoid becoming a victim of racism. In a way, participants are well aware of how racism works within this space, and they have their own way to determine whether a user is racist or not, and whether they need to disengage from them.

To push the point even further, F thinks that overt racial preferences on these apps are 'normal' and that users should not be bothered by such sentiments:

> It's normal that when you use these apps, some of them will clarify saying no Asian. Yeah, I won't be bothering them.   (F)

F's approach to dealing with overt racism on other user profiles is consistent with K's strategy of disengaging himself from these profiles. Furthermore, F also points out the consistent unspoken culture of these three apps (particularly in Grindr) in terms of covert racism and racial preferences:

> When an Asian guy is saying 'looking [for a] friend' on their profile, they are mostly like saying they want a Caucasian friend. And the Caucasian people also don't want to make friends with Asian people. This is why I don't make any friends or trying to on these apps. Too much guessing around.   (F)

F clarifies that, although some of the statements on a user's profile can appear to be neutral or colour-blind (presuming that they are happy to build a friendship with anyone regardless of their ethnicity), there is an assumption on the part of migrant users that these neutral statements are often directed at White users. It

could also be argued that these seemingly neutral statements on gay Asian migrant users' profiles such as 'looking for a friend' could have implicit racial undertones, where gay Asian migrants attempt to seek a sense of belonging in the community and to raise their own social position by making connections with the more affluent group in these apps: gay White men. This is also further exemplified by the fact that Grindr has the most gay White male users of the three apps examined, where the expectation of social connections are different and, most importantly, ethnic-based. In relation to Grindr being distinctively recognised by its popular demographic that consists of mostly gay White men, this could also be the reason why gay Asian migrants are still active on Grindr despite the potential discrimination, as it is the easiest place for gay Asian migrants to establish connections with gay White men that could alleviate their position.

Racism in the local gay community is anchored in and materialised in practice by these apps. The subtle and covert feeling of participants being discriminated against both by White and Non-White users is lived through vividly on these apps. In relation to the first interview question, participants felt accepted as an immigrant in New Zealand, but when their sexual identity was examined alongside the local gay community and its attitude towards race relations, participants felt discriminated against in a deeply rooted, racialised system that rejects them. Unable to change the situation, participants felt unwelcome in the gay community specifically and were unsettled by the level of racism that is thriving on these platforms. Throughout the interviews, participants talked about these apps as synonymous with the gay community suggesting that these apps are a reflection of the local gay community and its culture/practices. In other words, they agreed that the members within these apps represent the gay community's attitude towards race relations. Through their encounters of racism on these apps, the participants were lead to believe that the local gay community is racist as well. Aside from the subtle racism where participants reported that their messages were ignored or their profile blocked by other users because of their immigrant background and/or ethnicity, the expression of 'No Asian, No Indian' is a direct indication of the hostility of other users towards ethnicities that are non-White. This has been experienced first-hand by all my participants, and it forces them to acknowledge the racism that is directed to them on these apps.

4.3.8. Ethnocentric White gay community: the apps and beyond

The first area to examine when it comes to participants' uncertain feeling of belonging is the local gay community itself. As New Zealand is a predominantly Anglo-Saxon country aligned with western standards and traditions, it is unsurprising that its gay community shares similar values and ideals to other gay communities

situated in western countries. Following from the previous section, the underlying current of 'us versus them' within the local gay community undeniably stems from ethnocentrism. In turn, this affects how users interact on these apps, as well as informing the culture and beliefs of the community. When my Asian migrant participants have been confronted by the local gay scene's ethnocentric emphasis on Whiteness and western LGBT discourses, they have found it difficult to assert themselves. This results in participants feeling less confident about their physical appearance, developing problems of low self-esteem, and struggling to attain the western beauty standards that are deeply-rooted within the local gay culture. Furthermore, it also causes a phenomenon whereby gay Asian immigrants are trying to compete with each other to be accepted into the community. Moreover, some participants pointed out that gay Asian men are trying to distance themselves from their peers to assimilate into local western culture, so they can be distinguished among their peers as well as different from their peers. In other words, they do not want to be seen as part of the collective of 'gay Asian men who are undesirable', but rather as a 'gay Asian man that is desired by other gay men'. This then creates vicious competition amongst gay Asian migrants, who compete for engagement with gay White men in order to fit in and to distinguish themselves from the 'undesirable' gay Asian migrants.

4.3.9. The inner 'circle'

Some participants referred to the community as a series of circles. J and F both expressed their conception of the local gay community/scene as concentric circles that symbolise the hierarchy implemented within the community. This analogy of the local gay community as a tiered circle is significant as it exposes the power structure within the community, as well as painting a clearer picture as to who is in the centre of power in the eyes of gay Asian migrants. Participants agreed about the ethnocentric nature of the local gay community and stated that White gay men are at the centre of community interests, which remain focused inward.

> They [the White gay community] are not that open. They [local gay White men] are easy going, but not really. They have their own social circle, and if you wanna be friend and join their circle that is hard because we are not their type. Because I think if you want to truly integrate, you need to be in the smaller circle to be friend, but that is really hard.   (F)

> Caucasian people are still the majority race of this country, so if you want to have more sense of belonging, you need to make friends with more Caucasian people. That's one of my perception. If you just stay in the Chinese or Asian community, you will still feel like the minority.   (F)

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I don't know how involve you are with the gay culture, but there are some people in there with status, usually Whites, if you know them, you are closer to the centre. If you know them very well, you are even closer to the centre.   (J)

Both statements emphasise the 'smaller circle' (later also known as the 'inner circle' as referred to by J), where an outsider will want to be in order to be embraced and accepted into the culture fully. F also points out that to be in the smaller circle is hard for him because of his physical appearance as a different ethnicity. When F was asked why he wants to join the smaller circle, his answer became much more explicit, stating that in order to become part of the 'majority', relying on them (i.e. gay White men in the gay community) is a way of life, almost a means of survival. Both participants recognised the power structure within the community and the country, and acknowledged that 'Caucasian' (or, in a more contextual setting, Whiteness) is still the ultimate holder of power in this country, while the gay community is dominated and controlled by Whiteness. Moreover, to both participants, if they were in the smaller circle, they both felt that they could assume a more powerful social standing than the status attached to where they currently are. In addition, both thought that this would increase their chances to connect to many more people as a result.

The other interesting point to note is that when most participants spoke of the gay community and locals, they automatically assumed the people that were in in charge were White. This also provides a good vantage point to examine how Whiteness becomes the default that everyone and everything else is measured against, including and especially in the local gay community. Thus, since they cannot compete with or change Whiteness as a default, gay Asian men must compete with each other to achieve better status in the community. According to J, this competition among gay Asian men is a direct result of trying to get into the inner circle:

I find a lot of White people (most of my gay friends are White) they don't [compete]…. So I have noticed with my Asian gay friends… they often compare how many messages they have got… I have never seen that happen to like White guys, they don't compare messages, at least not explicitly.   (J)

You can elevate your status among your friends or community based on that… and they are even comparing how many White guys they have got. It's creepy. They are just trying to get there [the inner

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circle]. It's a measure of how close you are to the centre. It's easier to measure your success

qualitatively like this, I suppose.   (J)

The interesting point to note here is that the measure of success for gay Asian men is entirely reliant on the

attention given to them by gay White men. It is as though only gay White men can provide the validation that

gay Asian immigrants are seeking, which turns into self-validation. This phenomenon of validating one's

identity through the dominant party in the community can be explained by the complex position of migrants.

Where locally born gay Asian men might have the confidence of self-validation and insights into the desire

hierarchy of the local gay community, I argue that gay Asian migrants (especially new migrants) occupy a more

disadvantaged position because of their newcomer status and hence they need validation from the dominant

group of their desirability. Moreover, as noted in the previous section, they are seeking a White partner

because it is a new thing for them to try. Furthermore, in the quest of searching for a new identity in the host

country, the easiest way to make your way into the inner sanctum is to partner up with members that are

already there, as claimed in J's statement. This allows migrant users to elevate their position in the local gay

community.

The differences between a long-time migrant and a new migrant is further exemplified in the following

statement from J, where he agrees that whether one is included in the community or not depends on how long

one has been in the country. For J, growing up in New Zealand since he was a young child automatically gives

him access to the inner circle:

Referring to the circle earlier, being here for so long puts me into the inner circle automatically,

whereas people who are coming from outside.. that's different. Because I grew up here, I don't feel like

I am ever being excluded. I already know I am inside.   (J)

Despite his longer experience in the country, J also holds similar views of a 'circle' analogy. During the

interview, J repeatedly mentioned the 'circle' of the local gay community and his conception of how the circle

works. To J, the local gay community is divided into three distinctive layers: the inner circle (where all the

desirable and White gay men are situated, presumably holding most of the power), the middle circle (for less

desirable but more entrenched gay men), and the outer circle (for undesirable gay men and outsiders). J

agrees that the last layer is where most of the newcomers to the gay community and immigrants will be. J's

depiction of the ways to achieve access to the inner circle for gay Asian migrants are highly competitive and

problematic. For instance, J points out the comparative ethnicity versus sexual desirability criteria needed to make it into the inner circle:

> So like the way I like to look at it, if you look at this inner circle, if you are White, you only need to be like an 8, but if you are not White, you need to be a 10. Otherwise, you are not there. If you are Asian, and you are not there, you just need to be at the very top (physical appearance and attractiveness), like [the very top] 0.1 %. (J)

J's statement indicates the existence of a system within the local gay community to determine desirability. As the assumption of an ethnocentric gay community goes, this circle of desirability is to the benefit of White gay men while sabotaging others. In J's account, being a gay Asian migrant makes it harder to be a part of the inner circle because of the different physical appearance and social position. However, as J states, there is a small chance that a gay Asian migrant may make it into the smaller circle, if he is good-looking enough (which is a highly subjective and contested criterion) in comparison to both his peers and to the White gay community. However, this proves to be difficult because the standards of beauty within the local gay community are often evaluated from the perspective of traditional western standards of beauty.

4.3.10. Whiteness as the ultimate beauty: confidence, separation, and conformity

As far as the tiers of the circle operating in the local gay community go, the hierarchical structure determines what is desirable and what is not. This has a ripple effect on some of the participants, who cited the beauty standard based on ethnicity as their main source of low self-esteem. In the earlier section relating to personal preference, I quoted A admitting that the local gay culture may have conditioned his standards of beauty; A's statement is validated by other participants similarly recognising the hegemony of westernised standards of beauty, as demonstrated by their perception of desirability and attractiveness.

L's rather reflexive perspective on the community's beauty standards indicates the complex historical trajectories that contextualise how one is treated:

> I think the lack of beauty or the so-called lack of beauty according to western standards of Asian men is historically situated. It has a lot to do with colonisation. And how historically we are perceived and treated. It's the same thing as you are looking at black women. In general, we tend to be smaller or

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petite, but that's also a cultural thing. If you look out, you can see those Asian gym bunnies. You can't go, like, that buff Asian gym guy is not masculine.   (L)

L's statement is not just a strong rebuttal to the phenomenon of personal preference being just a matter of subjective taste, but his statement also points out that the systematic treatment of gay Asian men is interwoven with the discourse of colonialism. Any number of stereotypical assumptions about Asian men echo this discourse, such as the portrayal of Asian men as asexual in the media, Asian men being less masculine because they are generally smaller in comparison to their European counterparts, the stereotype of Asians being uncivilised and uneducated, and Asian men being seen as feminine and submissive. Given the predominance of these discourses, Asian masculinity will never be able to measure up to the ultimate form of masculinity as conceived by and through White masculinity. Moreover, L indicates that, no matter how much gay Asian migrants try to break away from the stereotype and move further into the 'inner circle', they will always be outsiders because of these preconceived notions of what Asian men are in the eyes of the ethnocentric gay community in New Zealand.

For J, gay Asian men occupy a peculiar position because they are not perceived as 'good looking' according to traditional western standards of beauty, and yet they struggle to gain any kind of attention from the gay community:

My friend is short, and he doesn't have double eyelids, he's got slanty eyes…I mean the western standards of beauty do not include the Asian standards of beauty at all … With my gay Asian friends, they kept saying how like White people are not buying into the whole Asian look very much …I would say gay Asian men tend to exoticise themselves to get more attention. I mean, It's better to be objectified by other people like that [getting sent 'dick pics' for example] or otherwise, you are nothing. At least you are an object.   (J)

J's assertion can be divided into several parts. First, he points out that the western standards of beauty often relegate gay Asian men to being unattractive, based on certain physical features; second, gay Asian men tend to exoticise themselves to attract gay White men; and third, gay Asian men have little agency when it comes to being objectified in a sexual manner rather than having a meaningful connection with others. Furthermore, J points out that being objectified is almost like a consolation prize for not being popular in the first place. Being

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objectified in this instance is about being recognised and acknowledged by the community, despite being categorised according to routine stereotypes.

Although objectification on ground of sexuality and ethnicity can be highly detrimental and lead to damaging representations, J recognises the potential advantages of being objectified. In this instance, not only is objectification an existing process utilised by the participants on these apps, but it is also a strategic positioning of one's identity and sexuality. J's example is an echo of Manalansan's (2003) earlier work: gay Asian men are able to reinvent themselves according to the situation that they are in. In his research, Manalansan points out that gay Filipino men in the United State utilised their stereotypical image of being feminine to create an annual drag beauty pageant that showcases their femininity. This in turn allows gay Filipino men to be heard and seen by the 'mainstream' gay community, where they can compete in a different avenue without having to achieve the impossible standards of White masculinity. Gay Asian men are aware of the stereotypes that are prevalent within the gay community and, when it suits them, they can utilise these stereotypes to their advantage, willing to risk the detrimental effects of objectification for conditional belonging. Moreover, knowing what the community desires provides them with the means to actively subject themselves to objectification, much like the gay Filipino men in the United States. In other words, if they cannot break free from the stereotypes, they then can embody the stereotype in order to be heard and seen.

As this research has pointed out in earlier chapters, New Zealand's local gay community mirrors gay communities in other western countries. This also means that issues such as sexual racism, or the prioritising western gay men over everyone else, are replicated in the local gay community. Gay Asian men, in particular, suffer similar treatment in a community that is predominantly White because of the existence of racial tensions that overlap with an invisible desire hierarchy that prevents gay Asian men from achieving full belonging or moving up the hierarchy because of their ethnicity. As some participants noted, the only way for gay Asian migrants to rise to the top of the desire hierarchy (which is synonymous with getting to the inner circle) is to rely on gay White men, although no guarantee is provided.

4.4. Summary

This chapter has illustrated how gay Asian migrants' sexuality is defined, limited, and influenced by the local gay community in New Zealand. They are situated in a very contradictory situation, where on one hand they feel like they are accepted as sexual migrants by the wider New Zealand society, and on the other hand they

are being excluded by the gay community that is supposed to celebrate their sexuality. Throughout the interviews, the idea of what the New Zealand gay community looks like from the Asian migrant perspective became increasingly clear. Although geographically situated in the Asia pacific region, its local gay community mirrors the practices, beliefs, and systems that are common across other gay communities in western countries. This has resulted in a westernised identity politics as well as sexual racism, which prioritises White gay men as the ultimate representation of what gay sexuality looks like.

Through these interviews, we can see that gay Asian migrants' sense of belonging and the degree of their integration into New Zealand are directly connected to the local gay community. Although participants agree that New Zealand is a step up from their home countries in terms of sexual equality and openness towards homosexuality, they also recognised a strong element that might not have existed in their home gay communities, namely, racism. This is further exemplified in their experience of using hook-up apps to seek new connections in New Zealand. Interview participants all agreed that racism is practised on these apps and is especially severe on Grindr. They also realised that the community and the apps are interrelated, whereby the apps merely serve as a reflection of the wider community's attitude when it comes to desire, ethnicities, and relationships.

Another critical perspective that these interviews have revealed is the intricate issue of 'personal preference'. Although apps like Grindr have a loose policy when it comes to dealing with racism on its platform, users are also actively masking their racist ideas by stating that it is their 'personal preference' to not want to connect with others, despite their preference being influenced by social-historical factors. Gay Asian migrants, as noted by my interview participants, find it difficult to interrogate others' preferences because they feel that it is a very personal and subjective choice. Furthermore, the interview participants themselves identified that they, too, have preferences, despite the fact that their preferences are often not as pressing or as prominent when compared to gay White men. In a way, it means that gay Asian migrants' preferences have always been there, but their preferences are hardly practiced or broadcasted in the face of an asymmetrical power structure that privileges other, including anti-Asian, preferences.

At this point of the research, one of the most prominent markers of gay Asian migrants is their paradoxical position. This ranges from being tolerated but disengaged from by both the country and the local gay community, to not feeling entirely sure whether they are part of the gay community or not despite sharing the same sexuality; at an extreme, they feel the need to justify others' race-based choices as personal preferences

despite knowing that they are racist in nature. This paradoxical sense of being accepted but excluded becomes a defining identity marker of gay Asian migrants, situating them in a constant position of ambiguity. This feeling is best displayed through their collective experience of these apps, where the facade of tolerance is transformed into pure disengagement on these apps. However, as negative as this paradoxical identity sounds, I argue that it is the way in which they begin to find their sense of belonging. Much like their experience of being objectified voluntarily and strategically on these apps, many gay Asian migrants discover that to exist in a constant state of conflictual negotiation is often better than to not exist at all. Furthermore, we should note the differences between being disengaged from by others and disengaging oneself from others. Although gay Asian migrants are constantly being disengaged from by other gay White men, they are also actively disengaging themselves from racist individuals. This difference between being the passive object of disengagement and actively disengaging themselves is a good indication that gay Asian migrants are not completely powerless. They are still capable of finding a way to retain a degree of empowerment to negotiate their identity.

Chapter Five

Profiling the profile: Content analysis of dating profiles

This chapter examines gay Asian migrants' profiles and representation across three respective apps: Grindr, Jack'd, and Blued. In comparison to the discussions in Chapters Two and Three of the interface designs of these applications, this chapter is dedicated to users' profiles, that is, the actual content of these applications. I am particularly interested in how gay Asian migrants construct their online presence given the design restrictions of these apps, as well as how they can potentially subvert the expectations that are imposed by these interface designs. This chapter presents the findings that are obtained from the content analysis conducted on the 100 gay Asian migrant user profiles found in these three apps (these users profiles are not from the same interview participants from Chapter Four).

The representation of gay Asian migrants across these three apps is slowly changing as a result of these apps' rebranding and repositioning themselves in the market. Due to hostility and the rampant racism that is evident on these platforms, gay Asian migrant users have long been trying various methods to protect themselves from cyberbullying and rejection (Callander et al., 2015). From avoiding filters by erasing information about one's ethnicity to quietly blending into the background by constructing an ambiguous ethnic identity, these strategies have been familiar tactics mobilised by gay Asian migrant users to conceal and protect their identity, hoping that this will yield more response from other users. However, the data presented in this chapter indicate that gay Asian migrants are now less likely to hide their ethnicity or to create an ambiguous ethnic identity; in fact, they are actively (re)claiming their ethnic identities and broadcasting it on these platforms. This is due to one crucial factor: the increasing demand of these apps for their users to be as authentic and as 'real' as possible. As these apps are transforming into 'lifestyle' products instead of a matchmaking medium, they are attempting to move away from just providing sexual gratification to their users; instead, they are slowly turning into the standard social media format that we are familiar with, focusing on authenticity and aiming at a holistic representation of one's identity. Previous stigmas associated with these apps such as promiscuity and engagement in highly sexualised spaces are no longer as prominent.

Even Grindr, the biggest and most popular gay dating app in the market with the greatest reputation for encouraging hookups, is rebranding itself as a multi-faceted gay lifestyle brand with its own lifestyle magazine.

On top of that, in 2018 Grindr launched a series of high-profile social marketing campaigns named 'Kindr' to curb racism on its platform. All of these moves signify a change in the nature of these apps: they are transforming from just a pleasure-seeking tool into a social media platform that focuses on lifestyle, relationship-building, and community-building. This creates a ripple effect on the ways in which people are using these apps. Users are increasingly inclined to use these apps as a social media platform like Facebook and Instagram, injecting as much authenticity into these apps as they have been doing on the other popular social media sites. These open and less discreet profiles result in a fascinating change in the way ethnic minorities position themselves on these platforms, with self-representation shifting from people covering or concealing their ethnicity to reclaiming their ethnic identity in a highly racialised digital space. In comparison to earlier studies (Caluya, 2006; Han, 2006; Payne, 2007; Riggs, 2013; Ridge et.al., 1999) which show ethnic minorities often positioned as helpless victims of racism, this new wave of representing one's identity in a multi-faceted way is changing what these platforms have always focused on: the display of carnality in the context of corporeality, which has implications for ethnic (self) representation.

In relation to the phenomenon of users increasingly investing in open and transparent online identity, this chapter argues that gay Asian migrants' authentic representation of their ethnic identity on these apps is a reflection of two critical trends that shape modern online gay male culture as well as how the discourse of race is handled by the ethnocentric gay community in New Zealand. Firstly, the consistent display of one's holistic (ethnic) identity on these apps, despite the challenge of racism, is an indication of how an authentic and 'real' identity trumps carnality. Secondly, the common pattern of gay Asian migrant users constantly justifying their ethnic and cultural background is an important indication of them no longer hiding their ethnicity despite of the challenge of racism. They are also signifying their unique ethnic identity and social position as a migrant can constitute a desirable representation in these apps.

By embodying a consistent on/offline identity and representing themselves honestly as an authentic individual, gay Asian migrants are de-centring the focus on the ethnic-based corporeality that these apps have operated on and which is deemed desirable by the mainstream gay community. A new wave of assessing desirability on these platforms is thus gradually taking shape, whereby a multi-faceted, authentic, and consistent identity is more attractive than sheer corporeality that lacks authenticity and credibility. Furthermore, this move towards a holistic online representation of one's identity is slowly untangling the deeply rooted influence of western gay pornography on the representation of gay sexuality, and it is changing the modern online gay culture of New Zealand, one step at a time.

5.1. Method

For the data needed for this chapter, I have been collecting individual profiles from Grindr, Jack'd, and Blued by screen-grabbing them. The collection process lasted for three months in total, from January to April 2016, and ended at the point where I was finding a high volume of repetition amongst user profiles due to the small population size resulting from the limited location. I have created three user profiles on each of these apps as a participant observer, taking note of the design of these apps and to collect gay Asian migrant user profiles that can be found on them.

The first stage of my fieldwork was to observe the architecture and designs of these three apps, with results as discussed in Chapter Two. The second stage of my fieldwork focused on collecting gay Asian migrant user profiles and subjecting them to content analysis, which informs the arguments in this chapter. As a participant observer, I have made careful notes in my research journal about profiles that I come across daily when I log into these apps, three times a day (in the morning from 9am to 10am; afternoon from 12pm to 2pm; and evening from 9pm to 11pm) to capture the widest variety of profiles where possible. The temporal factor is important due to different users logging into these apps throughout different time in a day. To date, I have collected 100 gay Asian migrant profiles that fit the criteria of analysis for this project. There are 35 profiles collected from Grindr, 40 from Jack'd, and 25 from Blued. Finally, the third stage is to code these profiles into quantifiable categories to understand the patterns and themes that are reoccurring in these profiles. These 100 profiles were coded and categorised into four categories based on the type of profile pictures and written profile description. The four categories are 'migrant/ethnic identity', 'naming', 'selfie/torso pictures' and 'language'. Some of these profiles overlapped among these four categories. To standardise my research method, I only log into these apps when I am in Auckland's urban areas.

Due to the scope of the research, only gay Asian migrant users profiles have been collected for closer examination. However, in order to collect these 100 gay Asian migrant profiles, I went through up to 900 profiles per app each day that (100 profiles on each app for each log in session, three times a day) consisting of various users of different ethnic background to find profiles that fit the research criteria. This purposive sampling approach has the added benefit of allowing the researcher to observe and note down larger and repetitive patterns/trends that came up in other, non-Asian profiles on these three dating apps over the course of the three months.

There are two criteria for my selection of these profiles. First, the user should be of Asian descent; second, in addition to their ethnic identity, they should be of migrant background. The first criterion is easier to establish since visualisation of individuals' bodies and faces is abundant on these platforms, which in turn provide clues as to their ethnicities; in addition, the ethnic labelling system discussed in Chapter Two also helps to identify and confirm users' ethnicity. While it is possible this process is not fool-proof, since there is a possibility that I have overlooked Asian users who are not easily identified by bodily/facial features and who choose not to identify themselves as Asian from the drop-down ethnicity menu, such instances would be relatively rare and would also represent users outside the intended scope of this project. The second criterion, on the other hand, is more subtle and need a greater range of observational tactics to identify on both Grindr and Jack'd, except Blued. Blued has a built-in 'hometown' option for its users to fill in, which allow the researcher to easily identify users' place of origins. Grindr and Jack'd do not have this feature, therefore users tend to state their place of origins through either their username or profile description. In this case, there are often clues as to someone's migrant status on these platforms. For a start, most users of migrant background will often state their migrant status through either direct or indirect statement on their profile. For instance, in one of the profiles collected on Grindr, one user states that he is "in New Zealand for work, and [he is] originally from the Philippines and of Chinese Descent". Another user on Grindr identifies himself as "Auckland Chinese looking for friend". On the other hand, some users choose to insert specific national flag emoticon in their username to signify their nationalities and place of origins instead. Again, there is a possibility that I could miss a user's migrant status if they did not refer to directly or indirectly, but that is a risk that has to be taken in a participant-observer project. Once these two criteria were established, the profiles were collected via screen-grabbing and coded according to the categories that I have proposed earlier.

I am also acutely aware of the fact that how I read the patterns of profiles on these three apps is based on a personalised selection conducted not by myself but by these apps due to my locations and my status as a free user of these applications. Since these apps are constantly changing as their users move from one location to another, each user's experience will, no doubt, be different from that of others. For instance, the guys that I see on Grindr today when I am at home in a West Auckland suburb as opposed to when I am in the city centre are quite different in terms of demographics. For instances, users are much more diverse in the city centre in terms of ethnicity; whereas west Auckland suburbs, based on my field observation, have more Māori and Pasifika users, followed by European users and Asian users. This can also be attributed to the ethnic distribution of Auckland itself, where different areas attract different types of ethnic settlement (Chui, 2004; McIntosh, 2004; Matthewman, 2004) For example, East Asian migrants favour their settlement in North

Auckland (Chui, 2004), whereas South Auckland is the heart of Maori/Pasifika settlement (McIntosh, 2004). This almost distinct ethnic settlement in specific areas of Auckland directly determines the user demographics in these apps depending on the location one is in. In addition to that, being a free app user means I have restricted access to profiles in comparison to premium users. Therefore, I am not making a universal claim here that all users' experience is exactly the same, nor am I offering an objective, fully reproducible way to read the experiences and flows of information that traverse these apps. Because these apps are constantly changing and organising data in different ways each time someone signs in at a different time and place, they intentionally create a different experience depending on when and where one uses them. Therefore, my collection of these profiles is entirely contextualised by my personal encounter with these apps (such as different locations and time, and my position as a gay Asian man who have been using these apps ever since they were first introduced), as there are any number of variables that might change the type of information an individual receives whenever they sign in. This makes it significantly difficult to produce an absolute measure or reading. Furthermore, despite the researcher's attempt to find out the actual figure of the total number of users of these three apps in New Zealand, this has proven to be impossible as there are no reliable sources that could verify the actual number of users in New Zealand alone. As such, the quantitative numbers found in this chapter can only be taken as general indicators rather than solid statistical claims. Furthermore, these quantitative numbers have only been captured within a three-month timeframe; therefore, they are by no means representative across time, as the profiles change on a daily basis. In saying that, the data and observations that I have collected can be taken as indicative, since they are based on an average of profiles available to users in the same time and place as my collection. To be specific, when I examined the ratio of gay Asian migrant users to non-Asian gay users on these three apps, I first scrolled through all the profiles to the bottom of the page, where a premium subscription is needed to see more profiles; then I counted the total profiles that I was allowed access to: Grindr allows access to 99 profiles before the paywall, Jack'd allows 200 profiles before the paywall, and Blued allows unlimited profile views, but for the purpose of my research I stopped at profiles situated outside of Auckland (which comes to an average of a hundred profiles in Auckland). For the next step, I then identified both gay male Asian and gay male non-Asian profiles based on their ethnicity labels and profile description, and I counted them manually. From the pool of gay Asian men profiles that I collected in this way, I then further examined them to determine if they were from a migrant background as per the criteria that I mentioned earlier. This approach has allowed me both to undertake a focused analysis of gay Asian migrant user profile as well as to retain a general impression of other non-Asian gay men's profiles that I came across in the process of finding and sorting gay Asian migrant profiles.

5.2. Revisiting Cybercarnality

The framework of Cybercarnality (Mowlabocus, 2010), as discussed in Chapter Three, has illustrated how a specific visual culture is built into these platforms. Mowlabocus (2010) argues that gay digital space is heavily influenced by western gay pornography tropes, and that it has been created to reflect the pornified bodies that the gay community desires. As such, this is a space which celebrates carnality, corporeality, and sexuality. Moreover, it is a space that celebrates a particular identity: White European identity. It is hardly necessary to say that White European masculine bodies fare better than any other ethnic bodies on these spaces, as they fulfil the pornographic tropes and are therefore situated at the top of the desire hierarchy in New Zealand at least. Although Mowlabocus' original conception of this theory does not include ethnicity as part of the patterns and tropes he investigates, his historical analysis of how these tropes originate from western gay pornography is compatible with the claim that Whiteness is at the centre of the ability to be seen and to be desirable in this space. To put it simply, the carnality that Mowlabocus refers to is a highly racialised term. It implies a specific representation of carnality that is desired and wanted,   namely the carnality of White men. This subsequently leads to the cybersurveillance of beauty standards and masculinity in line with such carnality, which often leaves ethnic minorities out from this inner circle. As such, my core argument here is to propose a new way of using the framework of cybercarnality to look at the display of ethnicity, or the so-called honest display of a consistent on/offline identity. This framework helps to identify the tropes and patterns of gay identity online, which is structured to benefit the White gay male; it also illustrates the problematic barrier and cycle that gay Asian migrant users must break through to be seen as desirable. Therefore, gay Asian migrant users are actively seeking a way to challenge this seemingly only way to be desirable, by not only exempting themselves from these unobtainable standards but also changing the way they can represent themselves beyond the pornographic lens, such as the use of more facial pictures and the display of a more well-rounded identity. They, too, are redefining what is desirable and acceptable on these platforms.

5.3. Identity Consistency Matrix: The bodies, the face, and a holistic profile

Cybercarnality is a useful framework for looking back to when these apps were first introduced onto the market. Although the display of carnality is still an important aspect of the gay digital space, it is becoming more limited to certain apps or contexts as the main apps move to being more lifestyle-oriented. Subsequently, this transformation of gay dating apps into lifestyle/social media apps has created a new way to assess desirability, which I call it the Identity Consistency Matrix. This matrix names the standards set for consistency

of online with offline identity, which is constantly surveilled according to these norms. The Identity Consistency Matrix, moreover, is used as a measure to determine whether someone is attractive in a more well-rounded way, instead of just being the object of a fixated gaze on the body. This is usually achieved by triangulating images of bodies with pictures of faces as well as individual personal information that is thorough and detailed. In turn, the decentering of corporeality as the sole focus of desirability benefits the once marginalised groups that cannot attain such a specific corporeality (see Chapter Four). It allows gay Asian migrants to escape the focus on a version of masculinity that is rooted in an ethnic reality that cannot be changed, and instead to offer more of the other aspects of their identity to replace the obsession with carnality. This will help determine whether someone is desirable or not based on the quantity and quality of information that a user shares on these apps. Therefore, the body is no longer the sole source of social capital on these apps as they move more toward lifestyle-orientation.   This move towards social media model of these three apps can also be seen in newer gay dating apps in the market such as Taimi that are focusing on fostering social connection rather than solely sexual encounters (The Independent, 2019), as this will draw in larger user pools than an app that only focuses on sexual connections. Although the motive for these changes are profit-oriented, but these changes subsequently benefits gay Asian migrants' representation in these apps. For those seeking social connection, a well-rounded display of identity is often sought after as it indicates the various levels on which people may bond. Thus, gay Asian migrant users' limited ability to take part in the cybercarnality trope is being offset by to the blossoming and celebration of an authentic social and cultural identity on apps that have traditionally been stigmatised for their outright sexual aims The recent shifts have introduced a way to bypass or to ignore what was seen as the golden rule of these apps when they were first introduced: carnality. This is not to say that carnality is no longer valued on these platforms, but having a buff body is no longer the golden ticket to gaining favours and connections.

Additionally, the increasing demand of these apps' users to have not only (or not even) a full-body experience but also to fully embody their identity on these platforms has fostered a new way of communicating desires. Corporeality and carnality still have a significant role to play, but increasingly users are seeking more than just the promise of carnality on the newer apps like Jack'd and Blued. This is reflected in an interface design that encourages a consistent embodiment between online and offline identity, such as the facial recognition software of Blued, linking user profiles to Facebook and Instagram accounts on Grindr, and the ability to upload three profile pictures on Jack'd to warrant better identity confirmation. The verification of a consistent identity is essential to the matrix as it helps to concretise the virtual nature of online identity, especially when it threatens to become unclear or inconsistent in relation to other platforms. In turn, establishing the consistency

of off/online identity becomes an important measure for determining the quality of a profile (based on how well a profile is written, the visibility of a selfie, the transparency of someone's online identity in general), which contributes to the overall attractiveness and desirability of the person whose profile it is. This is not only a new way for gay Asian migrants to break free from unattainable corporeal tropes, but also to represent themselves more fully in order to level their playing field of desirability in what would otherwise be a cycle of carnality. The trend of the identity consistency matrix is beneficial for gay Asian migrant users as the emphasis is no longer on one particular aspect of one's identity but on a holistic blend of bodily attractiveness, facial expression and written description. This means that certain aspects of Asian migrants' identity, which have been deemed negative according to the sexual racism rampant on some of these apps, can be compensated by other factors. For instance, in Poon and Ho's (2008) study of gay Asian men in Canada, they found that their research participants acknowledged that Asian men might not be able to compete with White men physically, and so they reframed themselves as desirable partners/members of the community through asserting that Asian men have other redeeming qualities such as personality to compensate for their perceived lack of desirable physical traits. This is similar to what is happening on these platforms as users reframe themselves through other means of representing their identity, alongside the changing demands from the apps themselves that reinforce authenticity and consistency of off/online personality. This creates a new way of assessing desirability based on a much more holistic approach, by shifting the focus away from corporeality and emphasising the 'whole package'.

My findings below indicates four distinctive styles of representation that are influenced by this matrix: the use of languages other than English on these apps to communicate to other users; providing a more consistent offline identity online by indicating their real names; a substantial focus on the exchange of the pictures of faces instead of torsos to reinforce authenticity; as well as a constant reiteration of one's ethnic identity as an important social marker on these apps. Each of these patterns is contributing to the overall authenticity of a gay Asian migrant user's profile. When we have all four of these patterns appear on one profile, it creates a highly authentic but racialised online identity, in its attempt to break free from the racist standards of performing a gay identity on these apps

5.4. The use of non-English for profile descriptions and names

As these apps do not restrict their users regarding written language on their profile, users are free to use languages other than English in their profile description as well as their username. This non-English writing can be in the form of a user's profile name, or in their profile descriptions. The use of non-English language on user

profiles is a common feature on Jack'd and Blued in New Zealand. Out of the 40 profiles collected on Jack'd, 28 of the profiles contain some degree of languages other than English; 24 out of 25 profiles on Blued's contain non-English languages on both profile description and username . As these apps are arguably a product of globalisation and have been created for the global market, their default language is no doubt English, but this default is not mandated. Therefore, it is worth examining when there are profiles that defy this language hegemony. Profiles that are written in a non-English language are less common on Grindr, with five out of 35 profiles written in non-English. The use of a language other than English could indicate a change of population demographics in New Zealand on these applications. With the influx of migrants coming from the Asia region for trade and/or studies, and these apps expanding globally, the increase of gay Asian migrants on these applications is not a surprising phenomenon. Mandarin, Korean, Japanese and Tagalog are the most common languages that are found on profiles across these three apps in New Zealand.

The phenomenon of using non-English languages on these apps can be understood in a couple of ways. Out of the three apps and profiles collected, Jack'd and Blued have the greatest number of profiles that are written in non-English, with Blued having the highest among the three; Grindr has the least. This is likely due to Blued and Jack'd being widely used in the Asia region, such as East Asia and Southeast Asia in general with Blued being the most popular gay social app in China (itself created by a Chinese developer company), and Jack'd being popular in Asian regions such as Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong (all of which areas include populations that write and speak Mandarin and Cantonese). Grindr is more popular in countries such as the Philippines, and less so in the previously mentioned countries. Hence, when gay Asian men migrate from their country of origin to New Zealand, it is not surprising that they would continue to use the profile they already had which is also written in languages that are widely spoken in their country of origin.

Furthermore, depending on the apps they are using, the demographics of who can see the profiles varies, which explains the use of different languages as a tool of communication. Based on the three months observation on these apps, Grindr has more European-descent users, whereas Asian users predominately populate Jack'd and Blued. The proficiency in English varies between apps, even though these apps are being used in a predominantly English-speaking country. However, upon coming to New Zealand, where English is the main language, gay Asian migrants adapt and localise their profiles by including some brief English description to prevent alienating other users. Two very interesting profiles that I found on both Grindr and Jack'd illustrates the nuance of my argument. This particular user has two different profiles on Grindr and Jack'd (both with identical profile pictures), and his profile description and name is different between these two

apps. In the Grindr profile, the user's name is decorated with emoticons that are pertinent to his ethnic identity instead of written words. It displays a Chinese flag, a traditional Asian building as well as a bowl of noodles. His profile description is written in English. A simple semiotic and contextual reading of these emoticons helps other users to recognise his ethnic Chinese identity. Furthermore, his profile description is in English and has no other language added to it. On the other hand, his Jack'd profile has none of these emoticons, but his full (presumably) Chinese name, with a profile description that is written in predominantly Mandarin. This example suggests that this particular user is curating his own narrative to address a presumed audience of a certain demographic, as the users have multiple ways of speaking to the dominant crowd on specific apps (Chan, 2016). In this instance, this specific user assumed that other Grindr users might lack nuanced understanding of his ethnic identity; hence, he decorates his profile with rather simple but direct emoticons that help to contextualise his identity. On the other hand, the use of Mandarin on his Jack'd profile signifies his confidence that a sizeable Jack'd users would presumably understand the language. Moreover, it also indicates a large number of Jack'd users are Mandarin speakers.

Aside from the different demographics for these three apps, another way of understanding the use of other languages on apps that are used in a predominantly English-speaking country is the concretisation and integration of users' ethnic identity. As I have argued in Chapter Three, the apps provide simplistic yet ambiguous ethnic options for users to choose from; thus, users different languages in the written portion of the profile works to clarify the otherwise vague ethnic labels. For example, when a gay Asian migrant on Grindr selects 'Asian' as his ethnic label, it can be hard for other users to tell where exactly he is from at face value due to such a generic label, whereas gay Asian migrant users on Jack'd may select 'Asian' as the ethnic label, but write their profile in Mandarin or Japanese characters. This will instantly clarify their ethnic identity in terms of which part of Asia they are from. By doing this, other users can now recognise gay Asian migrant users specifically as either a Japanese, a Chinese, a Malaysian or even a Filipino, instead of the umbrella term 'Asian'.

This phenomenon works in tandem with my second point, namely that gay Asian migrant users tend to clarify their ethnic identity in relation to New Zealand in these apps (such as stating their ethnicity, their nationality, and their place of origins), which serves to either justify or to legitimise their social status and identity in both New Zealand and in the gay community. For them, the use of non-English languages reflects the root of their cultural identity and explains to the audience the ethnic basis of their relationship to New Zealand. Moreover, the use of a native language on these globalised apps further illustrates the paradoxical tension of

globalisation, as argued by Appadurai (2001): the more globalised we are, the more localised we have become. Gay Asian migrant users are arguably at the forefront of globalisation, and it is evident that they are holding on to their roots instead of completely assimilating to the host country by acting or representing their online identity similarly to the locals. Instead, they are using the apps to reassert their ethnic identity on a globalised platform, which helps them situate their social position alongside their transnational movement.

Conversely, the use of non-English languages in profiles also serves as an alternative filtration device on these apps. In my previous chapters, I have argued that the default filtering system on these apps allows users to filter ethnicities quietly and secretly; by using different languages to describe themselves and even using non-English as their profile name, gay Asian migrants can create their own filtering system by linguistic means. In other words, only users who are familiar with and fluent in these languages can decipher and understand what these profiles are saying, and thus the profiles written in non-English languages actively filter out users who are not fluent in the written language. This creates exclusivity amongst users who can read the language. This strategy is very simple but effective: users who have proficiency in these languages will be able to comprehend the written materials. This can be seen as an act of potential subversion by gay Asian migrant users to seek solidarity in partnerships that are inadequately provided for by the app's filtration design. Furthermore, this could also signify the type of potential partners that such users are looking for. As the stereotype of an old White rich 'daddy' and young Asian 'moneyboy' is still operative in the gay community, such profiles also serve to debunk the stereotypical portrayal of Asian men only looking to partner up with White men. Previous research on gay Asian men in western countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia (see Kong, 2009) have noted their research participants' desire to partner up with White men and refusal to see other Asian men as compatible partners due to the prevalence of internalised racism; that is to say, in these studies Asian men appear to agree with stereotypes that Asian men are effeminate and less masculine, as crystallised by mainstream media depiction of western gay masculinity. This observation has been at least partly debunked in my research; the language-based trend of gay Asian men looking for other Asian men for potential partnership is countering these older negative views and internalised biases.

The non-English language profiles on these apps in a predominantly English-speaking country like New Zealand reflect a very intriguing phenomenon. In relation to my initial argument that gay Asian migrants attempt to use these apps to fit into the gay community, they are indeed doing so, but they are also forming a new gay Asian community that is exclusive to the specific language shared by users. I argue that this is an effort to find solidarity and familiarity in a new country, and it is also a way for users to subvert the expectations

and rules that are in place on these apps. As I have argued in my first chapter, these apps have a tendency to universalise a particular gay narrative; however, the expression of different languages and cultural codes through these languages is changing this attempt to instil and to regulate a western-centric gay narrative and set of tropes. Current trends reveal the consolidation of ethnic identities in the face of the cultural homogenisation that is otherwise prominent in these applications.

5.5. The politics of naming

The ways in which gay Asian migrant users present their username is another one of the striking differences between gay Asian migrant profiles and non-gay Asian migrant profiles. Across these three apps, users are required to enter a username that is tied to their account. It is similar to any other social media platform where users must choose a username as their online identifier. How users choose their profile name is, of course, different across the three apps. Users are free to create any names they wish, but from the 100 profiles that this research has collected, most of them has a username that resembles a proper name (For example, 'Andy' or 'Albert') instead of a username that is abstract (for instance, using emoticon as username, or username that only states desire such as 'Keen and Open', or abstract username like 'Captain Blackbeard') or the lack thereof. There are no ways to determine if these proper names are the users' real name; however, the purpose of having a proper working name is about being perceived as a genuine individual by other users, regardless of it being their real name. Out of the 100 profiles, users are most likely to provide a proper name on Jack'd, with 35 out of 40 of profiles collected stating their name; this is followed by Blued, with 20 out of 25 profiles collected including a name; lastly, on Grindr, only of 10 out of 35 profiles collected contain a proper working name. Stating one's name on these apps is closely related to the notion of embodiment and verification. Additionally, it has to do with the de-stigmatisation of these apps to a certain extent. Because of their gradual dissociation from the notion of promiscuity and cybercarnality, users are more inclined to reveal aspects of their offline identity, starting with their name. Furthermore, the increasing demand from the apps themselves, in the form of interface design and asking users for greater verification of their offline identity, has also contributed to the phenomenon of naming. For instance, Grindr has provided an option by which users can link their Instagram or Facebook profile to the app, and Blued requires its users to perform a face-verification process to confirm their real-life identity. Most of these demands for embodiment and verification are justified for security purposes. For instance, the verification process helps to tackle issues such as fake profiles that are used for spamming; furthermore, it also make users of these apps feel like they are indeed talking to other real and authentic users. The use of this sort of verification method is one of the factors that contributes to users being more likely to identify themselves, or at least identify aspects of themselves that are consistent with their

offline identity and narrative, such as names. The politics of naming, of course, is significant. Providing a username works as a proof of intention. For instance, if one's profile has no name associated with it, or just consists of a generic, vague name that carries no credibility, then other users can doubt a user's sincerity and authenticity. As such, their intention of being on these apps is often presumed to be for purposes of anonymous sexual encounter, closeted sexuality, or affairs that resist verification because it might expose their identity. On the other hand, having a full name (including first and last name, and even initials) carries more weight than a nameless profile, as it serves to signify that the user behind the profile is genuine.

The striking differences in the usage of names among these three apps are worthy of consideration. The choice to give a specific username or not is related to how these apps are populated by particular demographics that are using these apps for specific purposes. For instance, if a user is looking for a hookup in Auckland, he will probably use Grindr. This is due to Grindr's users being stereotypically known for hookups; if he is looking for social meet-ups for either friendship or a relationship, then Jack'd or Blued might be better apps to serve that purpose. The intricate connections between interface designs, demographics, and branding of these apps impact the degree to which people will or will not reveal their identity. Moreover, the interface designs determine the type of interactions and representations that occur on these platforms. For instance, Blued has always been focused on community building and the collective experience of its users by building an interface that allows forums, chat rooms, and groups for its users to join. Thus, Blued users are more inclined to share their offline identity to find genuine friendships or relationships. This is also reinforced by Blued's design and affordances, where users have no choice but to verify their identity prior to joining the platform through a facial verification process. Furthermore, Blued has also moved to video chatting capability, allowing users to watch videos of others as well as have video chats with others (similar to a Skype video call). The focus on video chatting results in difficulties for users who wish to stay anonymous or to provide as few details of themselves as possible. Moreover, Blued also features a function that allows a user's picture to be automatically deleted within a set period after being viewed by others. This means that users can happily send pictures of their faces without worrying about their identity being revealed to others accidentally. These features are built in so that users can represent themselves consistently both online and offline without worrying about security implications, which encourages authenticity on the part of users. The designs of these spaces are created in a way to make the users feel like everyone is part of a collective experience, looking for something that extends beyond just sex. On the other hand, Grindr in New Zealand is associated with anonymous and no-strings-attached hookups; therefore, the revelation of one's genuine offline identity is not always as readily available or as accessible as on Jack'd and Blued.

Aside from having a name or not, the type of names that are presented on these three apps should also be examined. Gay Asian migrants are more likely to include names and/or initials that signify their ethnic identity on Jack'd and Blued, and less likely on Grindr. Instead of having generic English names, some gay Asian migrants on these apps retain their ethnic names on their profile. Returning to my earlier point about how the use of languages other than English on some profiles defies the hegemony of the English language, this retention of one's ethnic name is also an insistence on representing one's ethnic and cultural identity. While some migrants choose to adopt Anglo-Saxon names for the ease of other English-speaking users, the use of ethnic names on these profiles is signifying a will to retain one's ethnic identity. Furthermore, the other part of this politics of naming includes users providing either their ethnic names in full or initials that could be deciphered down the line to reveal their full names. The significance of having one's ethnic name on their profile is that others can identify their ethnic background easily, and the name also works as part of the relay process between images and words, which helps users to concretise another's identity by matching up the name with the images provided. This allows the users to make out if the profile that they are looking at is consistent or not, which also helps with the process of determining the desirability of another user. Moreover, this practice enables a user to assess the authenticity and genuineness of the profile that they come across, which supports the identity consistency matrix that in turn props up desirability. For instance, if a profile features a Japanese-written name or a Chinese-written name, other users can easily identify these characters and cross-reference to the image that they see on the profile to confirm someone's identity. Having a readily identifiable ethnic name on one's profile is another crucial but subtle way to fill in the gap which these apps have created with their vague ethnic labels.

5.6. Redefining Masculinity: The decline of carnality and the rise of the selfie

The other prominent feature of gay Asian migrants' profiles is the specific types of pictures that are common across all of these apps. A user can choose to attach any type of picture (body or face) to their profile depending on what it is they are looking for. For example, the picture of a body without a face often represents the desire for anonymous sex and pleasure-seeking; a picture of a face on a profile often signifies a user who is looking for 'meaningful' connections (Chan, 2016). In contrast to the number of torso pictures found mostly in non-Asian users' profiles across these three apps (there are also some Asian users with torso pictures only, albeit far fewer than amongst non-Asian profiles), a majority of gay Asian migrants' profiles are generally populated with pictures of their faces. Furthermore, these faces are often constructed purposefully instead of taken candidly.

Both the app developers and users on these platforms are demanding more and more consistency between offline identity and online identity. For instance, users can now sign up to these dating apps by linking to their Facebook or Instagram account, which is arguably a move on the part of these apps to try to secure as consistent an identity as possible from their users by sourcing identifiable markers directly from one's public social media account. An obscure profile will not garner much attention from other users, as these apps are increasingly being treated like any other social media platform, where users expect others to be visible and open like they do on standard social media platforms. Since a profile picture of someone's face is often a basic requirement, users also demand those who do not have any profile picture to send a picture of their face if they wish to initiate a conversation.

In a way, a picture of one's face is an important 'ticket' to continue their communication with others. Thus, a picture of a user's face is now the most sought-after social capital that one can have on these apps, to be exchanged for further contact with an interested party (Miller, 2015). This cultural shift in which these apps demand a face picture of users has also created a new way of doing a selfie that is influenced by media technology and the reshaping of gay masculinity in the Asian regions, which is then imported to other countries by migrants who use these apps. With the proliferation of photo-taking apps that are focused on taking the perfect selfie, such as Meitu, Meipai, and Wuta, these apps have come into use in the Asian regions, such as China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. (Fan, 2017; Varagur, 2016; South China Morning Post, 2016). These apps are also designed in Asia, aimed at the Asian market, and feed into Asia's beauty culture, which is predominantly occupied with having the 'perfect face', such as having double eyelids, bigger eyes, fuller lips, and smooth, fair skin. Initially aimed at female consumers, these apps are designed with feminine appeal in their aesthetics, such as a pink interface and beautifying features to create longer eyelashes, tone the face, and soften the focus. Based on the three months research observation, more Asian men are using these apps to take selfies and photos, which are then uploaded to Blued and Jack'd, for instance. These photos can be easily identified with the brand's watermark on the corner of a picture. As media technologies are interrelated more than ever before, photo-taking apps also feed into the changing visual tropes that appear on these apps.

As I have argued throughout my chapters, these apps have been dominated by western values of sexuality and beauty; therefore the beauty standards are often a reflection of western ideals , which in gay male culture usually refers to hyper-masculinity, Whiteness as the ultimate specimen, and larger genitalia as proof of one's manhood. These standards are often grounded in corporeality, where the body (instead of the face) is used to

showcase one's masculinity. Venturing into the territory of proving or performing one's masculinity through a selfie can be challenging, because selfies tend to be focused on the face, rendering the body the secondary attraction of a profile. If the body is the site which best verifies one's masculinity, however, proof of masculinity itself can come into question by the shift to face-based photos. On the other hand, it can be argued that, since performing one's masculinity corporeally has mostly been a westernised notion, gay Asian migrants are used to perceiving facial beauty as the primary social capital in this environment instead of the obsession with the body. Of course, this is still affected by the affordances offered by these apps. For instance, users on Jack'd and Blued can have both facial pictures and torso pictures on their profile at the same time, whereas Grindr users are only allowed one profile picture at any given time. To make things more complicated, the demand for authentic identity and embodiment in these online spaces is changing the way that masculinity can be performed as well, which contributes to the new brands of masculinity that we are seeing across these three apps today. In many ways, this also signifies that gay Asian migrants can compete in this new arena with a new way of performing masculinity, through selfies. In comparison to the way their ethnic bodies were marked as undesirable before this new wave, they are now able to represent themselves more holistically, potentially attracting other users based on additional factors aside from their ethnically marked bodies.

The primary difference between selfies on gay Asian migrant profiles and other non-Asian profiles is what I call the 'level of craftiness'. In comparison to non-Asian profile pictures that are either taken candidly or casually (photos taken without any editing, or photos taken when a person is in a natural state without any intentional posing), most of the gay Asian migrants' selfies that this research has come across are highly crafted and thought out, manifested in a rather formulaic pattern of selfie-taking (73 profiles out of 100 profiles contained selfies that are similar in style). This formula includes the way they smile or pout their lips slightly to the angle of the camera, the filter effects, as well as the soft focus. All these features are quite common and popular within gay Asian migrants' selfies. In comparison, non-Asian profiles pictures are differently produced and circulate different tropes than gay Asian migrant profiles. As observed and noted during the three months profiles collecting process, non-Asian profile pictures are less constructed than gay Asian migrant profile; most of these profile pictures are either taken candidly or through a direct point-and-shoot method that appears to be instantaneous and spontaneous. There is also a lack of soft focus or further special photo effects on the non-Asian profile pictures in comparison to gay Asian migrants' profiles. One very significant point arises from this observation: the way that gay Asian migrants represent themselves through these series of profile selfies is traditionally and commonly seen as feminine. The use of soft focus, the light pouting of their lips as well as the photoshop effects are commonly associated with femininity. In contrast, non-Asian gay men represent

themselves on their profile in ways that are seen as less constructed and natural, which is often associated with the type of New Zealand masculinity that features stereotypical men who are 'down to earth' and 'no fuss'. Of course, there are still overlaps between this data; some gay Asian migrants have a sense of 'no fuss' elements and vice versa (27 out of 100 profiles contain this element).

The increase in the number of pictures of faces instead of torsos also signifies a change in how users represent and perform their masculinity on these platforms. Torso pictures and pictures that showcase traditional notions of masculinity (ripped abs, muscles and so on) remain popular on these apps, but there are equally more selfies that feature the face as a focal point publicly. Although this is still primarily affected by which app one is using and for what purpose (Grindr has more torso pictures amongst non-Asian users, Jack'd and Blued have fewer torso shots and more lifestyle pictures similar to that of Facebook pictures and Instagram pictures), this is nonetheless a significant change in what is being requested as a social capital on these apps. This is illustrated in the new online lingo of 'npnc', meaning 'no picture no chat' (which normally refers to a visible face picture), where users demand that other users show a picture of themselves before anything else can take place (see Figure 5.9). The importance of selfie is also captured in Mowlabocus' (2010) pioneering study of online gay dating websites:

> The face-pic articulates the issues of self-identification, honesty and integrity and many users value this form of self-representation most highly, not least because they see it as validating profile; to many it is an act of investment and confirmation that can never be afforded a faceless profile. (p. 103)

Furthermore, users are also explicitly stating in their profiles that other users must ensure a picture of their face is readily available if they wish to get a reply. The picture of the face has superseded the importance of torso pictures, as the abundance of torso pictures is no longer a reliable way for one to determine authenticity and desirability.

Conversely, as selfies are increasingly popular across all three apps, this trend also reveals a striking difference of priorities between gay Asian men and gay White men when it comes to assessing beauty and desirability. I call this the 'aesthetic priority', according to which different cultures prioritise different beauty standards. This could range from body types and appearance to attributing significance to specific parts of an individual. According to Yang et.al's (2005) study of Taiwanese men's body image, the fetishisation of a muscular body as the ultimate masculinity is a western standard that does not generate as much traction in

Asia. To illustrate this further, we can also look at the representation of Korean male pop stars in the media, which often centres on their androgynous image with the emphasis is on their face rather than their body. A majority of Korean male pop stars are not known for their muscled bodies,   but instead for their beautiful faces and their seemingly perfect blend of masculinity through their dancing and singing and femininity through their makeup and fashion style. Moreover, Korean male celebrities are also known to be brand ambassadors for makeup and skin care brands that focus on the aesthetic of the face. This example showcases how a non-western culture lays emphasis on different parts of an individual as the basis for standards of masculinity, which helps to explain why gay Asian migrants prefer to have a selfie on their profile rather than a picture of their bodies. To gay Asian migrant users, the face is the site where the majority of their desire can be localised, away from the body. In a way, this shows that gay Asian migrant users on these apps are rejecting the internalised racist standards of masculinity which can only be achieved by having the 'correct' ethnicity in order to be deemed as desirable.

There are two implications of this representation of gay Asian migrants across these applications: first, members of the local gay community could stereotype them as the feminine 'other'; second, they introduce and constitute a kind of masculinity that challenges the western beauty standards that have been common in New Zealand. This opens up a way to perform gay sexuality that defies the rigid representation of gay sexuality based on westernised notion of masculinity. For my first point, the often-feminised selfie method practised by gay Asian migrant users that s prevalent across these three apps could potentially reinforce existing ethnic stereotypes that are already popular within the gay community in New Zealand. As gay Asian men are typically seen as the feminised 'other' and exoticised as the submissive bottom in New Zealand's gay community, the feminised selfie does feed into this stereotype. However, its popularity should lead us to ask after the roots of this practice. After all, if these stereotypical feminine selfies are detrimental, why do gay Asian migrants practice this representation? Could they be exoticising themselves in order to reach a particular audience? Alternatively, are they so comfortable with such a representation that they ignore the potential implications and repercussions? The answer to these questions might lie with the different aesthetic priorities across different cultures. Since the notion of masculinity varies across cultures, the way to perform masculinity is different as a result. Carrillo (2004) argues that when a sexual migrant arrives in a new country, they bring with them the knowledge of sexual subjectivity and performance from their country of origin. Thus, what is deemed according to western standards to be a stereotypically feminine performance of gay is still being exercised in New Zealand because it abides by the standards gay Asian migrants have long been putting into practise in their country of origin. In other words, this so-called stereotypical feminine

performance of gay sexuality might not be seen to be feminine in the migrant's country of origin. Since these differences in what is deemed as desirable vary across cultures, the context in which these migrant practices of performing gay sexuality differently should be examined according to spatial and cultural specificities.

In the New Zealand context, these selfies are read as being feminine because the standards of performing a masculine gay sexuality are influenced by the western ideal of gay hypermasculinity that is influenced heavily by western gay porn. When these selfies are used in the Asian regions, however, they might not necessarily generate the same reading. As I have argued throughout my previous chapters, the user experience of these apps is primarily affected by geographical and cultural differences. One could use the same app in China and get a completely different reception from its use in New Zealand. In other words, the standards of masculinity celebrated by the users of these apps are location-specific. An example of this lies within the cultural representation of men in gay pornography, and how it influences gay men to perform their sexuality. I argue that this could be a good vantage point to look at why these 'feminine selfies' could be read another way, aside from being stereotypically feminine. In Mowlabocus's (2010) research on gay digital space in the UK, he argues that the influence of western gay pornography has become deeply rooted in gay digital space and affects how gay men represent themselves in this space. Furthermore, he argues that western gay pornography works as a crucial reference point against which all desires and carnality are measured. Richard Dyer also points out the significance of western gay pornography to western gay identities as it has occupied a symbolic position since the gay liberation movement. In other words, gay pornography can be considered an anchoring point for modern western gay sexuality, and hence its representation is mimicked and followed by the mainstream gay community. However, gay Asian men are often underrepresented or stereotypically portrayed in such mimicry, which affects how the gay community perceives gay Asian men. Richard Fung (2005), first in his essay and then in his documentary exploring the representation of Asian men in western gay pornography, argues that the sexual racism in gay pornography has created a specific trope of gay Asian male representation within popular gay discourse. He argues that Asian men in western gay pornography are often the exotic oriental, submissive and always playing the role of the bottom (the penetrated). It casts them as the outsider that does not fit into the desirable contemporary portrayal of masculinity. However, the increasingly decentering of carnality and corporeality in these three apps and the renewed emphasis on selfie meaning that gay Asian migrants are able to bring their own standards and self-representation practices with them when migrating, thus paving the way for a new style of representation to emerge in these three apps in New Zealand.

5.7. The constant reassurance of one's migrant/citizenship/ethnic identity

This phenomenon of constantly reiterating one's ethnic identity and cultural identifiers is more prevalent among gay Asian migrant users on both Jack'd and Grindr in comparison to non-Asian gay men. It is less prominent in Blued partly because the app introduces an option within their profile where users can fill in and display their 'hometown' (where they are originally from) for others to view (since the app's update in 2018, this option has been changed to 'where I live'); hence there is less explanation needed to express one's origins. However, the lack of a 'hometown' option for users on both Jack'd and Grindr is not the only reason why this phenomenon of stating one's ethnic identity is occurring in these two apps. Based on the three months research observation, this constant reiteration of one's ethnic/citizenship/migrant identity is nearly exclusive to profiles that are readily identifiable as non-White gay men (gay Asian men, gay Maori/Polynesian men, gay Middle Eastern men). There are a handful of gay White users who identified their national identity as 'Kiwi' in their profile, but most gay White users' profiles do not contain any description of their national or ethnic identity. The only exception is gay White users who identify their own ethnicity when they are looking for a partner of a specific ethnicity. For instance, there are plenty of profiles that state 'White looking for Asian', or 'GWM (gay White men) looking for GAM (gay Asian men)'. This phenomenon raises a series of questions. For instance, why do some Asian migrant users need to make a point of distinction by saying that they have lived in New Zealand for X amount of time? In addition, why are they constantly restating their migrant status?

The 100 profiles that I collected across these three apps (35 profiles from Grindr, 40 from Jack'd, and 25 from Blued) stated directly or indirectly their social position/identity. These expressions of one's relation to the host country and their identity can be categorised further into four types. First is the expression of one's identity as a legitimate New Zealander; For example, one profile used the term 'NZ-grown', while another involved a user stating he is 'from New Zealand'. Another user also states that he is 'NZ raised'. Second, aside from stating one's roots in the 'home' country, other profiles attempt to establish their relationship with the host country on the basis of temporal factors. For instance, one profile features a user stating that he has 'been in the country for > 10 years", and another states that he is a citizen in New Zealand (which presumes that he has been living in New Zealand for a number of years). Third, the expression of a user's location-specific ethnic identity is also common across these profiles, especially to the extent that such expressions explain transnational aspects of identity. For instance, one user states that he is a 'Taiwanese based in Auckland", while another user states that he is an 'Asian guy, Chinese from Auckland". It is also possible to see gay Asian migrants often expressing their ethnic identity and origins through the use of flag emoji.

The ongoing and repetitive patterns of Asian migrant users stating their ethnic identity and social status warrant further examination. In a way, the reiteration of their ethnic identity works in inverse proportion to the legitimacy of their membership in the gay community. In other words, the constant reassurance of their own identity is in direct contrast to the lack of statements about ethnic identity found on a majority of the European users' profiles, whose ethnically hegemonic position allows them legitimacy as 'natural' and 'entitled' citizens that do not need any reiteration of their identity. Asian users who are born in New Zealand, on the other hand, still have to justify their place of birth. This creates an asymmetrical power distribution within these applications, whereby Asian users often find themselves in the situation of having to explain to other users where they are from, even though they are in and quite possibly from the same country as everyone else in the locality, or have emigrated to New Zealand from a young age. The similar patterns found amongst these profiles on Grindr and Jack'd suggest that being a gay Asian migrant user is still not seen as being a full-fledged member of the gay community in New Zealand; instead, they are often stereotyped as being an outsider who is constantly justifying his ethnic identity in relation to the host country. As gay Asian migrant users are continuously alienated and positioned as the outsider to the local gay scene, the legitimacy of gay White users is being reaffirmed through the negation and denial of gay Asian migrants (and other non-White ethnic gay men such as Maori/Polynesian men) relation to New Zealand. It also implies that a gay Kiwi (mostly referring to non-Asian, and more specifically, White Kiwi) has more rights than a presumably non-Kiwi when it comes to choosing partners. The assumption of the locals having more rights than the non-locals on these applications results in gay Kiwis having more power to choose whom they want, what they want and how they want it, thus setting up an asymmetrical power hierarchy where gay White New Zealanders dominate over gay Asian New Zealanders and other ethnic gay men, and lastly gay Asian migrants.

Although the constant reiteration of one's ethnic identity on these platforms may appear negative at first, there are positive reasons why users are actively doing this. Such reiteration could potentially help gay Asian migrants to construct an identity that is different from the local one, in order to either seek solidarity with other migrant users or as a point of distinction to attract a different crowd. As their physical features and ethnic roots have conditioned and restricted them to perform a drastically different identity to that desired by the local gay community, this new way of representing themselves as a point of difference can be an effective strategy to attract other users. Furthermore, by being transparent about the ethnic differences that alienate them in the first place, they form a collective identity or bond with other Asian users, thereby creating a sub-community whose members can use each other as a reference point and model for how one can perform a gay Asian migrant sexuality. To further my arguments about this reiteration of ethnic identity, some profiles even go as far

as reiterating their ethnic pride, with descriptions such as 'Proud Asian'. Such descriptions are an exclusive

phenomenon that is only found within gay Asian users' profiles. This description can be found quite frequently

in Grindr during the three months observations of these apps, although less so on both Jack'd and Blued. The

use of such a description can be understood in a few ways. First, this sense of pride may be a defence

mechanism to cope with the continuous racism on these platforms. By claiming to be a 'Proud Asian', the user

is publicising his refusal to feel ashamed about his ethnicity. It also signifies to other users that if they cannot

respect his ethnic identity, then they are not to approach him. Second, this description can be seen as a

'protest' against the current hegemonic model of gay masculinity that is highly racialised. As I have shown in

Chapter Four, gay Asian migrant users are aware of the hierarchy within these apps, as far as desire goes. By

reiterating their ethnic identity in a way that is different from self-exoticism, they are trying to defy the racialised

desire and reaffirm their ethnic identity amidst the impossible beauty standards that are constantly policed by

the community. By stating their ethnic identity proudly, gay Asian migrants are   refusing to play by the

standards that are set by the mainstream gay community, which is arguable a form of resistance to the

hegemonic desire hierarchy.

5.8. Discussions

The findings from analysis of the sample profiles indicate that assimilation into the local gay community is not

always the priority of gay Asian migrants. Contrary to previous claims that migrants use digital space to seek

ways of assimilating entirely into their host country, the profile data that I have collected from these gay apps

illustrates that gay Asian migrants are often protective of and insistent about their ethnic identity. They

are acutely aware of their ethnic roots and background, and there is often no attempt to conceal it. Contrary to

the belief that migrants are more likely to assimilate to gain full-fledged membership into the local gay

community, my research findings indicate that gay Asian migrants are looking to retain their ethnic identity and

cultural background while incorporating local gay identity and norms. The status of being a fully functional and

agentic member of the local gay community is almost too difficult for gay Asian migrants to obtain due to the

highly racialised ideology of legitimate gay embodiment. Thus, gay Asian migrant users on these apps are

often rendered less masculine than the hegemonic standards and hence less desirable to others, which

directly contributes to their alienation from the community. As illustrated in my findings, these 100 profiles from

gay Asian migrant users are explicit in terms of representing their cultural background. Their constant

reiteration and justification of their ethnic roots is an act of honesty and good faith as well as a reflection of how

the requirement of being a 'legitimate' gay man in New Zealand is almost unachievable for them due to their

migrant and ethnic identity. As such, the better option now seems to be a display of their ethnic identity, as a way of grappling with the reality of these apps.

Of the three apps, Grindr and Jack'd, through their local users, tend to propagate western beauty standards that alienate anyone who cannot meet them. As gay Asian migrants struggle to meet such standards due to their inherent ethnic identity and social identity as a migrant, the only way to exempt themselves from these unobtainable standards is to embrace their identity and devise a way to perform their sexuality that is still desirable to their audience and ensures their existence on these apps is not overlooked or undermined. As much as these apps are affording their users with better customisation of their online identity and presence, the users' primary identifiable features such as ethnicity and cultural background are not as customisable as those options. They cannot choose to wear their skin colour differently, which is often a source of potential alienation from other local gay users. Therefore, the only way to participate in this exclusive environment is to establish a point of difference rather than attempting to blend in. By taking advantage of the apps' increasing demand for consistency of users' offline and online identity, gay Asian migrants are offering a full display of their cultural background in order to defy the western-centric expectation of beauty norms. In this way, gay Asian migrant users are changing the standards of representation found in these three apps, from written profile to the visual tropes of pictures. The willingness to champion one's ethnicity and social position, amidst the increasing desexualisation of profiles is in stark contrast to what these apps used to be when they were first introduced onto the market.

The reason why this research has focused on three apps is partly to understand their differences, but also to note that they work synergistically in terms of feeding off each other's differences and similarities in the way they provide opportunities for users to represent themselves digitally. For instance, if Grindr is constructed as a place where users can represent themselves as hyper-sexualised, then Blued is taking the route to representation of a more holistic self while Jack'd balances between them as a site of westernised beauty standards that nonetheless allows users to represent a digital identity that is about more than sex. In other words, these three apps cannot be viewed in isolation; rather, they must be viewed concurrently within the larger context in which they exist. In other words, the construction of one particular app within this genre is influenced by the other apps in the market. This helps to explain why certain apps attract specific demographics and audiences. Furthermore, it also explains why and how gay Asian migrant users represent themselves differently across these three platforms.

Placing these apps in the larger context of gay digital space also requires us to think more historically when it comes to the Asian migrant experience in New Zealand. In comparison to earlier Asian migrants to New Zealand who endured lower socioeconomic status (Spoonley et al., 1991, 1996; Ip, 2003), Asians who have migrated to New Zealand in recent decades are often professionals and occupy a higher level of economic and educational capital. With global capitalism promoting overseas investments and multiculturalism embedding a more ethnically diverse society, Asian migrants are in many circles celebrated as a vital investment commodity as well as a model minority with a humble lifestyle (Spoonley et al., 1991, 1996; Ip, 2003; Poon and Ho, 2008). However, it is also worthwhile to note that not all gay Asian migrants will benefit equally from the 'model minority' image. As identities are often intersectional, gay Asian migrants from different Asian regions face different sets of challenges when it comes to dealing with oppression. For instance, my South Asian interview participant has noted the different treatment between using the label of 'Asians' or 'South Asians' on Grindr, to which he noted how the latter carries more negative connotation than the former. He attributed this to the problematic mainstream media portrayal as well as the contested and politicised idea of the South Asian community in New Zealand. Despite this, the generic image of the affluent Asian migrants with considerable capital is still prevalent in New Zealand (Ip, 1996; 2003). With the elevated social position of Asians in New Zealand, gay Asian migrants are beginning to be able to reinvent and reframe their identity within the local gay community as a new affluent migrant class that is attractive due to their social and economic capital. This could be one of the reasons why gay Asian users of these apps often reiterate their migrant status in their profile, a practice which must be seen as both a recent and positive turn. Moreover, as these apps place more emphasis on lifestyle choices rather than simply sexual hook-ups, gay Asian migrants are also more likely to reframe the standards of desirability as these apps move away from the influence of western gay pornography and toward their reinvention as social media platforms.

Chapter Six

Elusive gay community: uncover the desire hierarchy through apps.

This chapter examines what a gay community looks like in New Zealand from the three apps that this thesis has examined, and what it means to be a gay Asian migrant in New Zealand's gay community. Drawing on research findings in my previous chapters, this chapter attempts to locate the position of gay Asian migrants in New Zealand in connection to the evolving gay community established through these apps. In the previous chapters, we know that the designs of these apps promote a very specific vision that reinforces western standards of beauty; moreover, the designs also directly influence how users can or cannot represent themselves, which ultimately has led to a rise of subversions by users in their attempts to change the standards of beauty favoured by the apps. Furthermore, as the interview participants stated in Chapter Four, racism in New Zealand's gay community is alive and well, and all of them recounted their perception of the local gay community being a distinctively White-centred one.

It is thus imperative to examine the history of the gay community as well as its trajectories over the years to get a sense of where it is situated now, in conjunction with mediated technologies like mobile phones and apps that shape the contemporary gay community. More importantly, how do gay Asian migrants, along with other gay men of colour in similar social and cultural positions, fit into this predominantly White gay community in New Zealand? As mobile mediated communications are increasingly becoming a 'window' for us to look in on the gay community, their role should be examined accordingly. In many ways, the actuality of the gay community has never been so clear since the introduction of these mediated communication technologies, such as web dating and mobile dating apps. When we used to talk about the gay community, it presented itself in either a monolithic fashion or in a rather unclear manner as to who is actually in the community, or what the community looks like. However, through examining these three apps, we learn that they each represent and attract different demographics in the gay community, which serves to debunk the homogenous gay community that gay mobile dating apps often try to depict. With these apps consolidating most of the community's members onto confined platforms, we are offered a glimpse into what this community looks like and what its culture is.

My core argument in this chapter is that, despite the attempted homogenisation of gay sexuality by these three apps through mirroring the values of the local gay community, the current transformation of these three apps

into a social media format could ultimately benefit gay Asian migrants in terms of their representation online. In relation to these transformations, the apps can be seen as a means to alleviate gay Asian migrants' discriminated social position in the community by being able to represent themselves holistically through these current changes. Across these three apps, gay Asian migrants are also able to switch apps for more options to practice their sexuality, as these three apps cater towards different segments and needs of the gay community. In relation to this, this chapter also suggests that we should look at the community as being comprised of various segments that are diverse in their practices and standards in order to break away from the traditional understanding of the community as a monolithic entity, given the manifestation of different apps that attract certain demographics. In a way, these apps, despite the problems that they have created, both directly and indirectly, can also be used as a tool to illuminate and materialise issues that are difficult to identify outside of these platforms. Therefore, these apps facilitate discussions around what the gay community looks like now and what issues it struggles with.

6.1. The gay community: Who are they?

The idea of a 'community' is highly contested and debatable when it is used to describe the relations of gay men. The gay community is never strictly a physical entity nor a geographically bound populace. The term 'community' often implies a sense of shared history and experience that enables people to bond and to identify with each other. This sense of solidarity supposedly transcends temporal and spatial boundaries, which has led scholars like Altman (2001) to argue for a 'global gay identity' that is exported and shared across the world, with the United States as the birthplace of the notion of gay 'community'. This implies that every gay man in the world, regardless of his social and political circumstances, should be able to celebrate and appreciate the course of events that gave birth to this gay community, even though it was created out of a set of specific circumstances that are found in North America. Under the pretence of a global gay community, this stance of seeing the Western-led creation as community for everyone is undoubtedly problematic and overly simplifies many of the differences that gay men from other countries experience.

The term 'community' implies a sense of unity and agreed identity, suggesting its members share similar, if not identical, visions. However, this sense of community or communal identity is often obscure and unclear, and it tends to homogenise community members within a singular, uniform, and reductive identity (Ridge, Hee, & Minichiello, 1999). This uniformity means that its members must conform to a homogenous identity, or they risk being alienated (Ridge et al., 1999). The commonly found assumption that the gay community is a

homogenous and unified entity, as depicted by the media, fails to reflect the underlying tensions and diversity amongst its members (Han, 2006, 2007; Payne, 2007; Ridge et al., 1999).

The gay community is often constructed as a predominantly White community with issues that pertain to White gay men more than any others (Murray, 1996). Topics such as coming out, marriage equality, sexual freedom, state recognition and so on are issues that predominantly affect White gay men (Teunis, 2007). These are also the issues that the wider society hears about when it comes to the gay community, while these issues are prioritised above everything else within the gay community. However, such agendas put forth by the mainstream gay community are not necessarily priority concerns for those in the community who are non-White, poor, and/or young (Teunis, 2007). The social and cultural capital of White gay men is further illustrated by their affluent status as the ultimate consumer in pink capitalism, where they are courted by the market because of their consumption power. Returning to my earlier observation in previous chapters about the different tiers of masculinities that exist in society, although gay White men are marginalised by hegemonic masculinities due to their sexuality, they retain certain cultural and social capital that is inherent to their ethnicity of being White. Being White allows their voices to be heard more loudly than any other ethnic men in western societies that prioritise Whiteness. It also means that gay White men have significantly more social and cultural capital than other ethnic gay men when it comes to convincing mainstream society of their agendas.

As Teunis (2007) points out, upholding Whiteness in the gay community serves a few political objectives. First, it has allowed the gay community to be taken seriously in the eyes of lawmakers when it comes to legislation that concerns the gay community (Teunis, 2007); second, it introduced the image of affluent gay men who can be reimagined as legitimate and desirable citizens of society, thus allowing the gay community to be 'mainstreamed' and accepted by the society (Teunis, 2007). However, this affluent gay male image often excludes gay men of colour, as their ethnicities are often harder to be re-engineered into the already existing power hierarchy that alienates ethnic minorities. Moreover, this 'mainstreaming' of gay identity within society is inherently problematic as well. If Whiteness is seen as the dominant representative of this so-called gay community in most western societies, then it also means that the mainstream gay identity is, as an invisible default position, a White one (Callander, 2013).

6.2. The evolving gay community: trajectories through apps

The evolving gay community and its trajectories over the years can be separated into three major, interconnected stages. Although the pre-Stonewall and post-Stonewall gay community distinction is favoured as the point at which modern gay identity was formed (Manalansan, 1995), it risks the danger of categorising modern gay identity into a 'before and after' approach, which fails to capture the intricacies between stages. Furthermore, this pre- and post-Stonewall mindset fails to consider the kinds of gay community born out of a very localised set of political conditions in other localities (Manalansan, 1995). These temporal stages that I am suggesting are specifically related to western gay communities such as the United States, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand. In addition, non-western gay communities have completely different trajectories, as their cultural and political conditions do not allow them to replicate western trajectories.

In the first stage, the gay community and its way of connecting others to each other occurs through the sharing of the same sexual identity: homosexuality (Altman, 2001; Callander, 2013; Teunis, 2007):. In many mainstream Western countries, this was fortified further by the push for gay liberation, unity during the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s, as well as their struggle for recognition by mainstream society. The second stage of a gay community that follows on achieving such recognition, at least in some measure, helps its members find solidarity through the social and legal recognition of homosexuality, in matters such as decriminalisation of homosexuality, same-sex unions, and being recognised as full-fledged sexual citizens of the state (Altman, 2012). The third stage of a gay community is deeply interwoven with mobile technologies, as people spend much of their time constructing a desirable identity online to showcase on platforms which are arguably an extension of the gay community. These apps not only mean the extension of the gay community, but they also serve to extend the reach of gay men as the apps become indispensable to modern gay men's search for sexual belonging and established connections in relation to the increasingly ephemeral and elusive gay community – White and non-White gay men alike. Just like the saying 'the ties that bind', the modern gay community is bound by these apps, connected by them, and shaped by them. What we need to take into account is that these stages are created under very specific political and cultural conditions that have occurred in similar western countries, with America being at the epicentre.

The first two stages are characterised by their political aspirations and missions, and there were tangible issues and experiences that shaped this collective identity which was shared by many gay men on the basis of such missions (Altman, 2012). With a majority of their political agendas achieved and their social positions

becoming more stable, the question remained as to what exactly could now bind the newer gay men in the gay community. Although there are recently formed political aspirations that are pertinent to the wider LGBT community, such as the trans rights movement, gay male culture and the community are beginning to enjoy mainstream status in a new western political landscape that has increasingly accepted homosexuality, coupled with the benefits that accrue to them as men in patriarchal society.

I argue that the current stage (that is, the third stage) of the gay community is characterised by its reliance on gay dating apps to determine sexual desirability, forge individual connections with others in the community, and renew the focus on pleasure and leisure-seeking. In addition, this stage of the gay community that we are seeing has also become increasingly mainstream, positioning itself as an acceptable and legitimate part of the society. This is further reflected by these apps' repositioning as lifestyle-oriented apps that are slowly decentering their focus on sex and desire, and moving towards a holistic representation of their users through various interface features. This is a reflection of the apps' similarity to the gay community, which is also attempting to disassociate itself from the deviant, promiscuous, and sex-fixated gay identity that was prominent in the past, so that it can concretise its legitimacy as a reputable and respectable part of society. In addition, gay mobile dating apps have transformed online dating culture by provided effective formats even to their heterosexual counterparts. It is the first time in history that heterosexual online dating formats and the culture arising from them have been modelled on homosexual online dating culture and practices. This is evident in the creation of Tinder, the first mobile dating app to become popular among heterosexual individuals, which came out three years after Grindr's worldwide popularity. Tinder is arguably based on similar practices and ideologies that are common in most gay dating applications, where the focus on physical attraction and the abundance of visual display are directly modelled on gay online dating practices. If the first two stages of modern gay identity are characterised and connected by various social and political issues that forge a collective, then the third stage is characterised by its relationship with – and relationship practices by means of – mobile dating apps that are integrated with and define what a gay community is. With that being said, never has the gay community forged such an intimate relationship with mobile technology; the fact that gay men are dependent on these apps to seek out one another in the increasingly fragmented gay community is a good indication of this intimate relationship.

6.3. Intersectionality in the gay community and in the apps

As the previous chapters have illustrated, intersectionality is not appreciated freely and easily in the ethnocentric White gay community of New Zealand. To form a community that is truly diverse and accepting, we have to take into account how race and sexuality mutually influence each other. This is the only way to understand that gay sexuality has in fact never been fully globalised, nor has the gay community ever been a united one. Crenshaw's (1989) important argument by which she introduces intersectionality is particularly significant in my examination of the gay community, as the theory helps to highlight how each individual's experience is related to his/her other social and identity positions, such as race, class, sexuality, and gender. Crenshaw's argument also illuminates the fact that gay Asian migrants can hardly climb the social ladder within the gay community, despite their shared sexuality and gender, as they are often conditioned and restricted by their ethnicity and the different standards of masculinity imposed on them on top of their sexuality and gender. If the goal of being intersectional is to lend visibility to individual differences, then these apps and the gay community, working hand in hand, are erasing the visibility of differences by equating everyone's' experience simply because of their sexuality.

The lack of understanding of intersectionality in the gay community helps to explain why non-White gay men are unable to 'join the ranks' in the gay community due to multiple oppressions. This means that no matter how hard they work to pass as White or to perform Whiteness perfectly, they can never be White, and thus can never be the dominant force in any western gay communities. As the interview data in Chapter Four indicates, the beauty standards of the community, supported by surveillance practices to maintain such standards, can never be attained by working hard or moving upwards through the mobility ladders. Although these apps promote neoliberal notions of self-responsibility to a certain extent – such as working on oneself to become the hypermasculinised gay man that everyone desires, or sharing in the cultural understanding and background espoused by the rest of the community to warrant collective intimacy – these are simply part of the tactics of the apps to attract more users and benefit financially, as well as part of the self/community surveillance to make sure that these spaces appear and stay attractive for other users. Furthermore, the neoliberal discourse of choice, freedom and individual responsibility promoted by these three apps also hinders the potential of any meaningful intersectional understandings, since an individual's success/failure is divorced from any social and cultural factors other than his own (in)ability to perform under the conditions of 'freedom' and 'choice' given by these platforms. In reality, no matter how hard gay Asian migrants work to hypermasculinise themselves through participating in the gym scenario that is at the core of gay culture (Kong, 2009), or trying to pass as

White by speaking perfect English or demonstrating Anglo-western cultural understandings and practices , they are still very much rooted in their own biological reality when it comes to ethnicity. It is the one thing that they cannot change or alleviate or tamper with; it is also the most important element on which they are judged and assessed by the gay community when it comes to beauty standards and sexual desires.

It is increasingly important within any given gay community around the world acknowledge intersectionality; this is mainly based on the fact that transnational migration is an unavoidable reality in the era that we live in, which also means that a single monolithic representation of sexuality or community cannot be accurate anymore. Aside from migration, the fact that the gay community is comprised of gay men of different ethnicities is an unavoidable reality. The lack of intersectional awareness or incorporation into the mainstream community can be seen through two specific examples. First, the rise of different sub-categories or segments within the gay community indicates the failure of the community to listen to the voices of gay men of colour, thus neglecting them. In New Zealand, for instance, groups like EquAsian (which stands for equal-Asian) are founded on the shared experience of queer Asians (not just men) being systematically underrepresented by the community. Second, community services that are dedicated to the gay community are often divided along ethnic lines, stretching to distinctive services that cater to gay men from different cultural groups. For instance, New Zealand's AIDS Foundation and its HIV prevention campaigns often target gay men according to their different ethnicities and use different strategies to spread safe sex messages to them. On the one hand, it can be argued that these services understand intersectionality and try to respect everyone's differences; however, what ends up happening are that the services separate gay men based on their ethnic identities, without actually understanding that they are part of the wider community and wish to be treated the same as others with integrity and respect. Furthermore, separating gay men into specific ethnic groups and targeting them with 'ethnically sensitive' messages has failed to recognise the systematic and structural racism that informs such practices. By alienating and isolating them from the mainstream gay community, such putatively sensitive practices divorce migrants' ethnicity from their sexuality. In other words, aiming for inclusivity without any understanding of how intersectionality works ends up classifying gay men into recognisable ethnic groups without actually integrating them into the mainstream gay community, as could happen if ethnic gay men were involved in the decision-making processes in the gay community. Instead, ethnic gay men bear the brunt of decisions made on their behalf by the mainstream White gay community as to how they should practice safe sex and protect their bodies. This lack of intersectionality also seeps into the design of the apps themselves, which forms a never-ending cycle that loops back from one to the other, as these apps continue to reflect the mainstream gay community's attitude.

It is no surprise, then, that the three apps I have looked at have failed to consider the intersection between race and sexuality, which plays an important role in shaping the experience of gay men of colour. These apps are very much focused on universalising every user's experience by creating a 'one size fit all' system that neglects the diversity of their users. Although the app developers do throw in features that allow users to customise their online identity in terms such as ethnicity, these labels are unable to capture the complexity of how race and online sexual identity intersect with and affect each other. In many ways, the ethnic labels are simply isolated from their problematic contexts, and they are presented to users as something that can be put on and taken off, as well as isolated from any connection to their sexuality, without understanding that certain social positions and identities cannot be hidden away or shed, and no identity can be viewed separately from its other social positions. For instance, a White migrant to New Zealand from the UK will have a very different experience in these apps than an Asian migrant, despite the fact that they are both migrants.

Ultimately, the interface designs that separate out the social identities of their users fail to address the fact that all of these identities are connected. For instance, users are required to 'fill in the blanks' to constitute a profile, which essentially builds a profile based on compartmentalised credentials, such as height, ethnicity, gender, sex position, and more. These credentials are often isolated from one another, seemingly having no connection to each other at all. These apps thus create a world where everyone is boxed into the dominant, western-centric ideology of how gay sexuality should be performed; they assume that everyone should be able to fit themselves into this predominantly White gay community that rejects any deviations. Furthermore, the lack of intersectionality on these apps is fully evident in their filtration mechanism, where individuals can filter someone out based on one aspect of their identity, without having to think through the possible connection of this one with others aspects that together inform one's desirability.

The same thing can be said for the visual aspects of these apps, which reduce each individual literally into a flat 2D picture that neglects all of the overlapping identities. Whereas an intersectional identity is multi-dimensional, these apps attempt to reduce all of our identities into an instantly recognised format that ignores all the other oppressions that come from our other social positions. In Chapter Five I have identified the fact that gay Asian migrants are actively reinstating their ethnic position and their citizenry on their profile by insisting on stating their ethnicity in a more contextualised way in the written section of their profile. This is arguably an attempt by gay Asian migrants to acknowledge their struggle with intersectional identity, which has failed to be captured by these apps' simple drop-down selection of labels. By specifying their ethnicity as more

than just 'Asian' or stating their connection to New Zealand, they are trying to capture the complexity of being both ethnically Asian and a migrant, as both aspects inform their identity.

What, then, would an app that was committed to intersectionality look like? First, the restrictive selections of ethnic labels would be abolished. These race labels have always played an important role in the overall features of these apps. As Nakamura (2002) points out in her earlier research on drop-down race menus in cyberspace, these labels are highly problematic and restrictive, and they confine users to select something that only vaguely represents their rich ethnic background. All of the current dating apps on the market continue with this problematic feature without any significant changes. By contrast, the ethnic drop-down menu should be replaced with a blank space that its users can use to fill in a description of their ethnic background that best captures their ethnic identity. Such a space would allow for a more contextualised introduction of one's cultural background than a simplistic drop-down option. Second, the interface design should stop universalising user experience for everyone. This includes ascribing users to specific gay subculture groups like Grindr does, or attempting to slot users into a highly westernised understanding of sexual positions like all these apps do. The ways in which these apps are trying to categorise everyone into a manageable algorithm have created a problematic subculture, where everyone must adopt a label in order to fit themselves into the particular roles and subject identities that are favoured by the mainstream gay community; the apps hardly consider, however, that everyone's understanding of these westernised labels and roles can differ. Third, as is currently happening, the focus is slowly changing from just corporeality and carnality towards a more holistic representation of an individual. This includes putting in interface features that cater for community discussions, hobby groups that anyone can join despite their ethnicity, or even more open space for users to curate their credentials in a multidimensional way. Lastly, the move away from sex-fixated interactions could potentially reduce the phenomenon of sexual racism in the gay community towards gay Asian migrants, as other aspects of their identity and lives could counter the potential stereotypes imposed on them.

Of course, these are suggestions that are based on the research observations so far. The only way for these apps to actually incorporate intersectionality into their designs is for the app developers to understand the structural racism and inequality that permeate their platform. They have done well in terms of highlighting individual differences through their limited identity customisability, but they struggle to 'connect the dots' between these different identities and to understand how they combine to form specific narratives of someone's life. In many ways, as I have maintained throughout my thesis, these apps and the gay community

are symbiotic; each reflects the state of the other. It is thus not difficult to see where this lack of intersectionality comes from in the apps, as the material gay community itself is hardly intersectional.

6.4. Gay dating apps: the extension of the gay community

If, as I am arguing, the third stage of the gay community is heavily influenced by gay dating apps, then what does it mean to talk about these apps as the extension of the material gay community? Despite the convenience and the potential to connect with more people from the community, the irony here is that with the introduction of these mediated technologies of desire, we tend to see and hear the impact of racism on these platforms more directly than we did before they existed. This is mainly because these platforms give us a direct look into the psyche of the gay community, and manifest this psyche in a tangible way. I suggest that instead of seeing these apps as strictly synonymous with the community, we should instead consider them to be the vessels of an amplified collective consciousness of certain parts of the gay community that would otherwise function invisibly. When we look at the apps in this way, they serve to debunk the myth of a unified and homogenised gay community where everyone fits in perfectly based on their sexuality. Moreover, these apps are different when it comes to their demographics, which signifies a diverse gay community with different standards and needs, as well as desires. These apps also allow what Manalansan (2003) has called the 'quotidian' struggles of minority gay men to surface, which we should take into account when calling the gay community a united front.

Although there exists a distinction between an online gay community and a material gay community, my research has always maintained that the apps, which constitute an online gay community, are an extension of the material gay community. We cannot divorce one from another and argue that they operate on different planes and thus according to different standards. As I have argued in Chapters Two and Three, consistent embodiment across online and offline identities is increasingly sought after in these apps; thus, it is no surprise that the online gay community supported by these apps has strong ties to the offline standards and culture of the community, which form the basis of individual authenticity and shared collective intimacy. These two communities, online and offline, cannot be viewed separately, since one constitutes the other and vice versa. Jurgenson's (2011) argument of digital dualism also illustrates this increasingly intertwined online and offline world, where he argues that both of these realities affirm each other (similarly to the symbiotic relationship between gay dating apps and the local gay community as I have argued earlier). Jurgenson points to the example of 'Slacktivism', where the common digital dualist perception revolves around online activism as

something that is virtual thus does not affect the real world; he furthers the argument by using Arab Spring as an example of how online activism is part of the wider activism that has contributed to the overall movement, thus by extension, this online space becomes part of the extended space of the movement. In this context, we should not isolate the gay community as a separate space that is untouched by modern mediated technology such as these apps. This is especially the case with these gay dating apps, where one cannot talk about the current gay community without talking about the gay dating apps that helped to forge the gay community as it is today. Moreover, these apps are born out of the needs of the mainstream gay community, and thus – precisely in order to (continue to) be commercially successful – they must reflect what the gay community needs at any given time.

In a way, these apps have actually made the elusive and ephemeral gay community manifest in a clearer form now that it is tangible (via interface touch design) and visible (via profile displays) to its users. Unlike the Castro in San Francisco, for instance, New Zealand has very few dedicated 'gay community areas' that are demarcated as a communal area for gay men to meet others. Places like the Castro once provided a physical meeting point where the gay community could be seen and heard, and where its members could participate. Despite the few gay bars and clubs in Auckland,   these apps have allowed their users to locate this gay community in a way that transcends immediate borders and locations, which is an important space for gay men to find a sense of belonging sexually as well as according to their collective interests. At the same time, by seeing the community in its most condensed form, we are able to see the amplification of racism and other issues, such as westernised beauty standards, that are often subtle and hard to identify from our day-to-day life.

Logically, if we see these apps as an inherent extension of the gay community, regardless of its geographical boundaries, then that also brings to light the fact that the community is inherently racist. In his research on the gay online dating website Gaydar, Payne argues that an online space like Gaydar is indeed a symbolic and discursive space providing a sense of community and belonging to gay men. However, the online space could also be potentially detrimental as individuals may risk conforming to the norm due to the expectation from other users (Payne, 2007). Furthermore, Payne (2007) finds racism active on Gaydar and argues that hegemonic White masculinity on Gaydar or in queer cyberspace generally is maintained by constantly negating and marginalising other identities and ethnicities. The instance of racism on Gaydar analysed by Payne suggests that queer cyberspace may promise a utopia of openness and acceptance, but this is not the reality (Payne, 2007)). Similar to Payne's research, Callander et al., (2013) argue that the racism on gay dating

websites is a reflection of the wider attitude of the local gay community, which often marginalises non-White gay men.

Although I have argued throughout my thesis that these three apps reflect the general cultural attitude of the local gay community, I also suggest that, of these three apps, Grindr tends to focus on the dominant cultural ideologies of performing western gay male sexuality more so than the others. Against this, however, what we ended up seeing in the research findings are the subversions and attempts by gay Asian migrants to create a space for themselves to be a part of the gay community within the hostile environment in some of these apps. Moreover, the introduction of different types of apps that cater to different needs of the gay community reflects a much more diverse gay ecology than just a monolithic community as well. For instance, the emergence of Noir, a gay dating app that caters for 'lovers of diversity and gay people of colour' was introduced in 2017. Apps like Noir indicate not only that the community is diverse with different individuals interested in different people; the app is also born out of the sheer frustration of ethnic gay men and their encounters with racism on the other apps. These alternative spaces and platforms effectively dismantle the notion of a gay community as a strictly ethnocentric one and allow room for different practices and representations of gay male culture.

Furthermore, these apps are also slowly changing from a highly sexualised marketplace to lifestyle social media platforms that are moving away from just focusing on sex as a selling point. This in many ways also coincides with a change that is happening in the gay community, namely, the decentralisation of a fixation on sex from the early onset of online gay culture, as well as a renewed focus on individual authenticity. Sex in gay culture has always occupied a very important role; it is how masculinity is measured and how people live out the desire that identifies them. Indeed, the liberation of alternative sexual behaviours is still widely celebrated in the community. This also explains why these apps branded themselves as a highly sexualised marketplace in the early stages, as it was the quickest way for the developers to speak to gay men in a language that they know best: carnality. However, as demonstrated by the transformation these three apps are undergoing, gay identity is no longer just about carnal desire. The latest app to hit the gay mobile dating market illustrates this transformation perfectly. Taimi, a new gay dating app launched in early 2019, follows the format of most social media apps, with features such as sharing 'stories' that are similar to Instagram Story, creating groups and following other users, interactive feeds and so on. The three apps that this thesis has examined are definitely heading in a similar direction to new apps such as Taimi. Coupled with other social and political movements around same-sex marriage and equality, it can be argued that today's gay men like to be seen as legitimate sexual citizens, who are slowly transforming from social/sexual deviants and moving into mainstream society.

By moving away from the stereotypical representation as society's deviants, the gay community can amass political and cultural capital more easily than before.

Gay dating apps are also coping with this transformation by changing their interface into something that is more palatable to mainstream surveillance. They aim to become apps that do not need to be hidden away from the public eye; they also become evidence of the transformation of the gay community. As we can see from the apps themselves, this changing nature of the gay community's focus on networking and social identity rather than simply carnal lust offers an entry point for gay Asian migrants attempting to transcend their ethnic boundaries. This is because when carnal desire is no longer the fixation, it also means that physical desires are no longer the priority or precursor for social connections to be formed; instead, what becomes the basis of attraction is the holistic profile. This whole-person approach, similar to any other major social media platform, potentially subverts the racialised focus on sexual desirability.

From the preoccupation with carnality and physical desire to a consistent online identity that supersedes the body, the gay community in New Zealand, as elsewhere, is undergoing a transformation that defines modern gay identity as something that is beyond just sex and carnality. These apps have not only facilitated this transformation, but they also reflect it through their interface design as well as their focus. If the apps are seen as an extension of the local gay community, then this change could signify an opportunity for gay Asian migrants to be a part of this community, where their racialised corporeality is no longer the basis of rejection.

6.5. Gay Asian migrants and the community

The position of gay Asian migrants in the local gay community in New Zealand is a peculiar one. To a certain extent, it does not matter whether they are migrants or not, either on these platforms or in the material gay community. The fact that their ethnicity trumps any other aspect of their social status and identity in these three apps tells a rather straightforward story: they are the outsiders, and they are less desirable than their White counterparts when it comes to the desire marketplace in these three apps. In many ways, their ethnic identity is further highlighted by these apps themselves, which makes them even more visible in the online community that overlaps with the gay community itself. As Caluya (2006) argues, the visibility of ethnicity in the gay community is not always positive for ethnic gay men, as racial visibility is the 'precondition' of racism in the first place. Furthermore, the lack of cultural understanding by the Eurocentric gay community about gay men from other ethnic backgrounds, as well as the tendency of gay men of colour to keep to themselves, have caused

significant strains on the unity of the community as a whole. Pertinent to this, the dominant Eurocentric gay community mainly relies on racist stereotypes to provide them with quick cultural references, and, of course, this creates a skewed perception of reality. The prevalence of racism within the gay community creates lines of segregation rather than uniting them. Racism in the gay community has evolved from the simple mechanism of rejection and exclusion to the process of inclusion on the basis of 'othering' (Caluya, 2006). This is exemplified, for instance, when the desirability of a certain ethnic individual is based on their exotic quality and how they fit into orientalist desires, which ultimately leads to the spread of sexual racism in the gay community.

The prominent issue of sexual racism, in particular, is evident in a lot of western gay communities. Sexual racism renders gay Asian men, amongst other 'others', undesirable in the gay community, since gay Asian men are often stereotyped as less endowed and thus less masculine than their western counterparts. This sexual culture focused on phallocentrism marginalises gay Asian men further, as they are seen as incapable of performing their sexuality and masculinity due to their lack of 'manhood'. Sexual racism works through gendered discourse, according to which gay Asian men are seen as symbolically castrated, rendering them as undesirable as a woman in the gay community (Caluya, 2006). This symbolic castration of gay Asian men, or the desexualisation of Asian men in general, eases the insecurity of the mainstream society, especially in New Zealand, in the face of a growing 'yellow peril' (Han, 2006). The understanding behind this castration logic is that if Asian men are not capable of sexuality or reproduction, then they become less threatening to society (Han, 2006). The desexualisation of gay Asian men specifically encourages the gay community to see them as feminine and passive, and they become, at best, a commodity for consumption by the Eurocentric gay community, due to their apparent exoticism (Han, 2007).

In relation to the difficulties that most gay Asian migrants experience in their host country when it comes to constructing a multi-faceted sexual identity, Drummond (2005) argues that gay Asian men not only need to understand their sexuality in terms of the racism within the gay community, but they also need to understand their Asian heritage within a White, Anglo, heterosexual culture. Because of that, they must position themselves between Asian and western cultures that sometimes contradict their gay sexual identity. Drummond also points out the difficulties of identity construction for gay Asian men in a foreign country, as they not only have to have an identity that fits into the gay culture and the host country's heterosexual culture, but must also negotiate their Asian masculinity that values functionality and family (Drummond, 2005), such as the ability to take care of family, to provide for them, and to put family first before everything else (such as family

reputation and obligation), which contradict the common narrative of a westernised gay sexuality that favours individual freedom and rights.

Racial discrimination towards gay Asian men in the gay community causes them to be vulnerable to self-hatred and low self-esteem (Han, 2006). To counteract the negativity generated by racism from the gay community, gay Asian men might pursue gay White men to feel accepted by the gay community. Hence, in order to be desired by gay White men, some gay Asian men resort to internalising the stereotypes that are imposed on them.   Not only are gay Asian men often exoticised by gay White men, but they also actively exoticise themselves in order to cater to the 'orientalised fantasy' of gay White men (Han, 2006). This fortifies the feminine stereotype as Asian men actively perform it, and it leads to internal racism among gay Asian men, as they are likely to find other gay Asian men to be undesirable and incapable of a functional gay relationship.

It then bears asking, are gay Asian migrants part of the gay community if they are marginalised and alienated by the gay community? I suggest that the danger here is to look at this question from a binary perspective. It is easy to assume that since they are marginalised, then they must be unable to participate in the gay community. However, as I have argued with regard to tactics of internalisation and subversion, our focus should be less on binary distinctions than on what part gay Asian migrants play in the community, and how they navigate a community that is not always the most welcoming. Furthermore, the introduction of these gay dating apps has been helpful for them to identify a comfortable niche and position to occupy within a rather elusive gay community, which allows them to avoid racism where possible and find connections in different segments that appreciate them.

If it is the case that the gay community has been mainstreamed into New Zealand society and poses itself as a legitimate and accepted part of this society, then what does this mean for gay men of colour, especially gay Asian migrants, in this context? I suggest that the mainstreaming of the gay community or of homosexuality in general could be beneficial for non-White gay men to a certain extent. As reflected by these apps' interface designs, discussed in Chapter Three, users on these apps are favouring holistic profiles rather than focusing on a profile that only displays carnality and corporeality. This is also related to how gay men wish themselves to be seen by everyone else, as a holistic representation rather than a fragmented identity that is fixated on corporeality. This new-found online representation becomes beneficial to gay Asian migrants, as they can escape the vicious cycle of the highly desirable White bodies which they can never embody, and boost their own desirability through other parts of their identity that are valued more than just their physical bodies.

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I suggest that, instead of thinking of the gay community as a singular whole, it is more useful to think of it as different 'segments' that combine together to form a cohesive narrative. This can be productive because gay Asian migrants are never going to be able to fit into the monolith of a White-washed gay community based on their ethnicity; however, they can always find their position in various 'segments' of the community that celebrate their sexuality and ethnicities, thus granting them a sense of belonging in this community without being left out completely. Since being recognised by the White gay community would yield more equal opportunities and recognition, being a part of the gay community is more important to them than not being in it at all. These segments that I am suggesting here are not solely about the gay subcultures that we are familiar with: bear, BDSM, twink, daddy, and more. It is about cohabitation in a community space that is harmonious but allows for differences at the same time. These 'segments' are easier to understand through an analogy with the pride parade. The pride parade often comprises different organisations from the gay community that represent the community. For instance, a gay dance group, a gay boxing group, and many ethnic gay groups constitutes segments that form the gay community. Furthermore, although these groups share a similar sexuality, they are also separated by their differences, be it in terms of interests or ethnic identity or something else. This allows members in the community like gay Asian migrants to participate in these segments based on their merits and abilities, instead of competing for entrance through their raced bodies.

In similar strands, instead of seeing all of these apps as a wider reflection of the gay community as a whole, it is more beneficial to see how each of these apps corresponds to different 'segments' of the gay community just like the pride parade analogy, where they are put together to form a cohesive narrative of a diverse community. These different segments each represent a diverse part of the community, which basically provides a space for gay men of colour to flourish and to find a sense of belonging. For instance, the dominance of different ethnic demographics in the three apps that I have studied so far represent different segments within the gay community. While Grindr enacts the dominant psyche of the Western gay community that worships White beauty and alienates non-White bodies, Jack'd and especially Blued are a safe haven for non-White gay men to come together and escape (some of) the harsh rejections as well as racism. Furthermore, Jack'd and Blued are seen as spaces where gay Asian sexuality and identity are appreciated. On top of that, there are also other apps in the market that cater to different needs of the community, such as Recon, which focuses on fetish and kink relationships among its members, as well as Scruff, which caters to the gay men who are interested in the Bear subculture of the gay community. In other words, these apps flourish because they each represent different parts of the gay community that deviate from the more mainstream ideologies of the hegemonic gay community, and most importantly, these spaces allow different ways of representing gay

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identity to emerge. Although each of these segments is affected by the dominant western ideologies to a certain extent, nevertheless they are spaces that are easier for gay Asian migrants to integrate themselves into without having to assimilate completely or play by the rules of the dominant White community standards of desirability and beauty. By seeing these apps in terms of separate but connected segments of the gay community, we can begin to understand that the community is increasingly diversified. If these apps are an indication of the current state of the gay community, then they signify the possibilities of a transformation in the community that favours consistent online identity, as well as recognising the paradox of a community bound by similarity as well as differences.

6.6. Summary

These apps have helped forge a new modern gay online identity that is pertinent to the mediated network connections which we find ourselves in now. As I have mentioned before, the relationship between these apps and the gay community is a symbiotic one. One simply cannot exist without the other. This research has thus far observed several changes and trends that define the current state of the gay community and its culture, especially in New Zealand, as indicated by these apps. Although there is a move away from focusing on carnality and corporeality in these apps, these elements are still evident in the three apps that this research has examined. In relation to the highly racialised corporeal and carnal desires that define the ethnocentric White gay community in New Zealand, the community in itself is still predominantly centred on the experience and the agendas of White gay men, while neglecting the voices and experiences of other non-White gay men. However, as the gay community has increasingly become mainstream, we have witnessed how these apps are mirroring this transition by moving away from just focusing on sexual exchange, which is stereotypically viewed as deviant by the mainstream society, to introducing more functions and features that allow for an increasingly holistic representation of a modern gay identity that is well-rounded and thus more appealing to both gay men and other members of the society alike. This could signal a potential change of ways in which the community assesses the desirability of its members. I argue that ethnicity will always be a determining factor in assessing desirability in a predominantly White gay community in New Zealand, and it will not be completely abolished in the grand scheme of deciding compatibility and desirability. However, with the transformation of these apps, ethnicity as a determining factor could be downplayed, with other factors (such as class, age, financial capital, affluence, and more) becoming more important bases on which the community assesses desirability.

One of the most important arguments perhaps is the fact that these apps and the gay community are symbiotic, mirroring each other's' practices and culture, as well as feeding off of each other's practices. There are some apps that do this more so than others, such as Grindr, which is often seen as the epitome of the White gay community that privileges White gay men and marginalises non-White gay men. There are also apps that are more resistant to this notion of a White gay community standard, such as Blued, which attracts mostly other non-White gay men in New Zealand. The fact that these apps are operating on slightly different standards also confirms the segmentation of the gay community that I have previously mentioned, where gay men of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds can find their belonging in the community in spaces that welcome them, even if they are not dedicated to them.

The segmentation of the community does not refer to the separation of the community into oppositional forces that go against each other; rather, they are pockets of space that allow for diversity and differences to flourish, which, when combined with one another, form a cohesive but diverse gay community. To conceptualise this argument further, Bennett's (1999) notion of 'neo-tribalism' is helpful to expand on the segmentation of the community. Bennett's research focuses on youth consumption of different music styles and argues that the constant remixing and appropriating of music genre and styles amongst young people illustrated a sense of fluidity across different subsections of music. Thus, Bennett argues that it is more fruitful to conceptualise youth consumption of different music genres and styles as 'neo-tribal', which is more fluid, rather than the traditional framework of subcultural groups which has a more rigid boundary. The concept of neo-tribalism is also drawn from the discourse of postmodernism, where identities are fractured and multi-saturated, containing the possibilities of having multiple versions of the self in different areas without clear demarcation (Bennett, 1999). Under this framework, it perceives individuals as comprised of different identities that can both be segmented into different areas and still belong to the core music scene. This is similar to how the segments work in the gay community, where it can be seen as consisting of different neo tribes that contribute to building different aspects of one's identity and still maintain its ties with the overall community without any rigid separation. These segments are also incredibly important for gay Asian migrants and other non-White gay men because not only they can find their sense of belonging in the community through these different parts, but they are also parts of the community where sexuality and racialised corporeality are less focused on, thus decentering the raced body as the sole determination of desirability. As such, gay Asian migrants become a part of the gay community despite the marginalisation, and some of these apps provide them with a clear map of this segmentation of the community, where they can locate and navigate their way into a space that celebrates their bodies and their identities.

Realising the unrealistic expectation for non-White gay men to completely assimilate and be accepted by the predominantly White gay community, Manalansan (2003) argues that for non-White gay men, being in the community is not always about acceptance, but rather about others acknowledging and understanding their struggle and the disposition of their sexuality in a White gay community. In a lot of ways, the goal for gay Asian migrants is not about becoming 'one of them', but rather to be someone who shares similarities while being allowed to be different. It is this paradox and the struggle that has made and defined the unique gay Asian migrant identity, and it is through these struggles that they find their place in the gay community. I argue that we should stop seeing these struggles of gay Asian migrants as something that is completely negative, or as an indication that they are not in fact part of the gay community; in fact, these struggles are necessary for us to see that gay Asian migrants are definitely part of the community, and it is through these struggles that the segments of the gay community come into view which welcome them as they navigate rejections and marginalisation from and by the mainstream gay community.

Conclusion

This concluding chapter will review the overall findings that this research has yielded, followed by discussions of research implications as well as future considerations and recommendations for both scholarship and the design of gay mobile dating applications in general. This research has provided insights as to how a triply marginalised group in New Zealand – namely, gay, Asian migrants – navigate their way through a gay community that is exclusive and elusive, through the use of gay mobile dating apps. Although often experiencing alienation and disengagement from the gay community both online and offline, gay Asian migrants are actively countering the hostility towards them online through pragmatic use of the apps. Of course, this is not a matter simply of personal will; rather, the changes that these apps have undergone in the last five years have helped set the course for gay Asian migrants' newfound agency within a rigid computational system.

There are two important insights that this thesis has contributed so far. First, of all the apps in the market, Grindr is and continues to be the defining app that has popularised gay sexuality assessed through ethnicity, social status, and hierarchy of desires; these elements are then replicated by other apps in the market, including the other two apps that this research has examined: Jack'd and Blued. Furthermore, these sets of defining characteristics are promoted through interface designs that benefit gay White men by default, which concretise the expectations and standards that are widely practiced in most Western gay communities. In turn, these apps are giving rise to a so-called globalised western gay identity by universalising user experience with their interface designs, as well as socialising their users into westernised standards of performing gay sexuality.

Second, in relation to Grindr's role in popularising western gay sexuality, a large-scale transformation of these apps is under way. They are moving away from what Mowlabocus' (2010) earlier observed as a focus on cybercarnality to a social media format that foregrounds authenticity. This is slowly chipping away at the obsession of these apps with promoting carnality and corporeality as the most important token of exchange, and focusing more on the consistency of an on/offline identity at the top of the desire hierarchy. This is especially important for gay Asian migrants who have been previously rejected by others in the gay community for the reason that they are unable to meet the standards of carnal desire rooted in the White ethnic body. With the shift toward greater consistency and authenticity of identity demanded by and on these apps, gay Asian

migrant users are now able to break away from carnality as the only standard that defines them to represent themselves more holistically in other ways.

As this research has shown, gay mobile dating apps play an important role in gay Asian migrants' lived experience in New Zealand. In many ways, these apps have helped to manifest many of the issues experienced by gay Asian migrants that otherwise are difficult to articulate in a tangible way, such as: sexual racism, a rigid performance of highly Westernised sexuality, the beauty ideologies of the local gay community, and many more. Thus users and researchers alike are able to identify the problems and seek potential solutions to remedy these situations. Furthermore, by examining the narratives of gay Asian migrants both through their experiences of using the gay mobile dating application as well as situating themselves within the local gay community, this project has opened up insights into what the local gay community looks like, what its cultural practices and standards are, as well as issues that are pertinent to the community as a whole. As noted, this thesis has shown that these gay dating applications are slowly transforming into lifestyle and social apps, moving away from just being a hookup and sex-fixated communication medium in the gay community. As such, this thesis also argues that the position of gay Asian migrants is being alleviated in the gay community to a certain extent due to the transformations of these apps, which allows them to represent themselves outside of the highly racialised desires that were fostered by the apps before such transformations. Gay Asian migrants are now able to compete in a 'desire market' that assesses them for more than just their raced bodies as measured against Western beauty standards, focused instead on other aspects of their identity. Furthermore, I have demonstrated how these apps and the local gay community share a symbiotic relationship, where cultural practices and attitudes are replicated and mirrored in both environments. Below are the major findings that this thesis has contributed to the dialogue in the areas of overlap amongst sexuality, migration, and communication technologies.

7.1 Research questions revisit

Throughout this research, the four research questions that were set up have been answered accordingly. The first research question concerns how do gay dating mobile applications assist with or hinder gay Asian migrants from being recognised as legitimate sexual citizens in New Zealand. The thesis as a whole has argued that the original vision of these apps and their seemingly universal interfaces are not beneficial for gay Asian migrants to fashion themselves as legitimate sexual citizens. This is mainly due to gay Asian migrants are often being deterred by the unobtainable westernised desirability and standards, which are part of the

criteria to be seen as full-fledged members of the local gay community. However, as this research has shown, the transformation from sex-focused to authentic representation as desirable has enabled gay Asian migrants to be seen as attractive, which legitimises their position as sexual citizens in the local gay community to a certain extent. This argument is also most evident in Chapter Five where the shift towards presenting an authentic version of the self on these three apps is gradually becoming the norm of online self-representation. Moreover, this transformation also helps to downplay ethnicity as one of the important criteria to assess the desirability, and it allows users to focus on other aspects of someone's identity to inform their preferences.

The second research question revolves around the roles of these apps in gay Asian migrants' lived experience of New Zealand's gay community. This is illustrated in both Chapter Four and Six, where I have argued that one of the roles of these apps is acting as the 'mirror' to the local gay community, in which they reflect the values, beliefs, and ideological position of the local gay community. These three apps are also a physical manifestation of the local gay community, providing a vantage point into the rather ephemeral and elusive gay community as a whole for gay Asian migrants. These apps also allow gay Asian migrants to explore their sexuality within a confined and defined space, where the interface designs favour specific representations of gay male sexuality.

The third research question asks how do these apps help gay Asian migrants negotiate their own culture, the host country's culture, as well as the gay community's culture. This is answered initially in Chapter Four, where interview participants agreed that their initial understanding of the local gay community's ecology is through the apps that they are using. These three apps allow gay Asian migrants to understand local gay community's standards and cultures, which subsequently enabled resistance to the obvious culture of marginalisation of gay Asian migrants on these apps. This is illustrated in Chapter Five where gay Asian migrants' profiles on these three apps often reiterate their cultural identity and their migrant background to establish a point of difference.

The fourth research question looks into the ways in which these three apps and their affordances cultivate a specific online culture and shape users' behaviour and expectations. This is initially answered in Chapter Two where the Walkthrough method (Light et al., 2015) was applied to the existing interface designs of all three apps, and the result indicated that the different features of these apps offered different types of interactions, which subsequently shaped specific user interactions. In Chapter Three, the contextualised discussion on the visuality and the ethnic labelling system of these apps also illuminated how these features are part of a computational process that encourages specific ways of representation, and the underscored sense of

freedom and choice set up users' expectations of being able to get who they desire by ignoring the larger asymmetrical power distribution. Chapter Five also added a follow-up argument, in which these three apps attract very different demographics in New Zealand. Users' demographics across these three apps also played a part in shaping users' behaviour and expectation, for instance, there was less racism reported by the participants in Chapter Four when it comes to apps like Jack'd and Blued, as they mentioned that these two apps are mainly used by users of Asian descent.

7.2. Findings：

7.2.1 Globalised interface: Whiteness as default

This research has shown that the universalised interface designs of these apps are attempting to create a 'one size fit all' experience for all of their users, regardless of localities and the different gay ecologies between one location and another. These apps assume a very ethnocentric position when it comes to representing gay sexuality, as well as assuming a very Westernised understanding of race-relation discourses. This is then projected onto the actual design of these apps themselves, resulting in interface features that reductively categorise desire and identity such as simplistic ethnic labels which can be selected without any understanding of the consequences or historical significance of ethnicity. Furthermore, it suggests that Lisa Nakamura's (2000) earlier findings that cyberspace is inherently 'White' and designed with White users in mind are still accurate and applicable to these apps. In fact, these apps have exacerbated this default cyber-Whiteness to the point that everything is measured against it.

As noted in Chapter Two, the three apps that this research has looked at occupy specific positions, but all endorse visions that are relevant and related to the Western gay community. Furthermore, this affects the designs of the apps' interfaces, which are created to encourage specific rhetorics and modes of engagement that socialise their users into accepting the gay community's western-centric standards. The most important element within these design is the underlying procedural rhetoric of choice. Users are presented with a sense of choice, manifested as an element of self-responsibility. This shifts the blame for institutionalised and and systematic discrimination based on ethnicity onto ethnic gay men who are often marginalised by these processes, and attributes their failure to attain the beauty standards that the gay community desires to their own 'bad choices' and lack of self-discipline. Not only does this mask the problematic standards according to

which the gay community operates, but it also frames ethnic gay men as non-desirable, since they cannot attain the same standards – determined by the raced body – as other gay White men.

This rhetoric of choice was further examined in Chapters Three and Four in relation to the contested notion of 'personal preference'. As these apps are advocating for 'individual choice' from a free market perspective, the apps developers often assume their users all share the same degree of freedom when it comes to their desire, without acknowledging the cultural, social and political differences that severely limit marginalised ethnic gay men from having the same type of freedom and power to choose what they desire as their White counterparts do. Furthermore, this notion of choice informs the problematic rhetoric of 'personal preference'. To the extent that the apps present individuals with a chocolate-box range of other users from whom they can select, whatever choices are made by the individual falls under their own 'personal preference', which is supposedly detached from any political discourse or ideological constructs that might have informed their preferences. Thus, racism on these apps often operates on the plane of choice and personal preferences, where one's racist ideals and desires are masked by individuals' choices, whereby rejections and alienation are never about structural racism but rather a matter of personal 'taste'.

However, as much as these apps are trying to universalise everyone's experience when it comes to gay sexuality or to insist that the already marginalised ethnic gay men's failure to connect to others is their own responsibility, gay Asian migrants are beginning to subvert these designs for their own benefit. As noted in Chapter Five, which studied a sample of 100 gay Asian migrants' profiles, the subversions ranged from using non-English language to communicate to others who understand the same language, to redefining the norms in such a way that the carnal body is no longer the sole token of exchange for connections. It will be interesting to see how far these series of subversions can go to change both the representation of gay Asian migrants in the long run, as well as to affect the extent to which the apps change their designs to provide a more intersectional and functional space for ethnic gay men to participate and represent themselves in.

7.2.2 Gay community and racism: Symbiotic relationship

One of the most important findings of this research has revealed the symbiotic relationship between these gay mobile dating apps and the wider local gay community. As found in the literature, semi-structured interviews and analysis of profiles, both the gay community and the apps mirror each other's practices, attitudes, and beliefs. As noted in Chapter Six, the gay community is currently at a stage where it uses these apps to

materialise its ideology, its standards, as well as its culture. Through these apps, we are granted a vantage point into the local gay community, which is centred around the experience and perspective of gay White men and hence the apps award most of the perks and privilege to gay White men, thus constituting a phenomenon whereby they regulate the standards, the desirability, as well as the legitimacy of other ethnic gay men. For gay Asian migrants, who are also sexual migrants by the nature of their migration for reasons of sexual acceptance, the sexual liberation and expression that they are seeking in New Zealand turn into the oppressive mechanisms that marginalise them. In other words, the local gay community that is materialised by these three apps only allows gay Asian migrants to experience the freedom of sexual   expression that is consistent with westernised desires and standards, which often excludes them instead of providing the freedom of self- representation that gay Asian migrants are seeking.

As discussed in both Chapter Two and Three in relation to the interface of these three apps, these platforms are trying to foster a 'homotopia' that is relatable to gay White men but not others. If these apps are a reflection or a mirror of the gay community, then this 'homotopia' is inherently White and ethnocentric. As noted in Chapter Four, where gay Asian migrants were interviewed for their experience of these apps as well as their personal encounters with the local gay community, the racism within the gay community is alive and well, and participants experienced racism mostly through these apps themselves serving as a channel of representation of the local gay community's interests and standards. However, the interviews showed that gay Asian migrants' experiences within the gay community and on the apps are contrasting: they are tolerated by the gay community in real life (in community events or services), but they are alienated by the very same people in these apps.

Although it is tempting to draw a conclusion that gay Asian migrants are the helpless victims of racism in these instances without any real power to improve their condition, this is actually not the case. As discussed in Chapter Four, gay Asian migrants are also actively disengaging themselves from uncomfortable exchanges that are racially charged, thus retaining some degree of power to protect themselves. In many ways, these apps also allow gay Asian migrants to identify racist individuals within the gay community; thus they can preemptively avoid any altercations or uncomfortable situations. Furthermore, gay Asian migrants are also using these apps to counter the ethnocentric hierarchy of desires imposed by the local gay community, by reinstating their ethnic identity as well as their migrant identity on their profiles. Not only this has provided them with new forms of visibility, but it also allows them to showcase their ethnic differences and begin to shift assumptions in a seemingly homogenous community.

7.2.3 From Cybercarnality to the Identity Consistency Matrix

This thesis has tracked the trajectories of these three apps and other gay mobile dating apps in the last five years at a time when the apps are going through numerous changes to accommodate the rapidly changing market. The three apps that this research has looked at have changed one way or another, but the most notable shift has been their focus changing from being purely dating apps to becoming social media platforms. This is evident in their gradual rebranding over the years, which has moved from a carnal focus to emphasising users' authenticity and holistic representation on their profiles. Furthermore, apps like Grindr and Jack'd encourage their users to log in with their Facebook or Google account, which is intended to add another layer of authenticity and verification of consistent identity. On the other hand, Blued requires its users to perform a facial recognition process when they first sign up for the app, which serve to verify the identity of its users.

In many ways, these apps have come a long way from their previously stigmatised position in the dating market. From the torso-only pictures that once dominated the platforms to the current stage where there are more selfie pictures as well as the option of linking your profile to other social media accounts, these apps are moving into the realms of so-called legitimate social media, in order to dissociate themselves from the stigma of hook-up culture and attract users who are not ashamed of using them in public. Of course, this series of changes also affects how users represent themselves on these platforms, and most notably these changes have been beneficial for gay Asian migrants' representation. For instance, the shift from torso pictures to selfies is a good indication of how desirability has changed in terms of standards of assessment, moving away from a focus on muscled bodies that stand in for large genitalia to face-based images that draw on more feminised beauty standards while promising more authentic connection. This thesis has argued that this shift from carnality and corporeality towards a more holistic and authentic representation of users on these platforms benefits gay Asian migrants, who were unable to meet the earlier standards of attractiveness influenced by western gay pornography. Hence, gay Asian migrants who were previously marginalised and alienated due to their raced corporeality can now present other desirable traits of their identity instead of relying solely on unattainable standards of desire that are highly racialised. Not only can this help them participate in the gay community, but it also allows them to find a sense of sexual belonging through displaying other forms of social capital that were previously ignored.

In Chapter Five, I have documented the changes to gay Asian migrants' self-representation that are happening on these platform as a result of the apps' transforming themselves into lifestyle platforms similar to Facebook and Instagram. This also leads to a new matrix of assessing one's desirability through several distinctive factors, such as the picture of one's face and the details written on one's profile. I term this the Identity Consistency Matrix, according to which a holistic as well as a consistent off/online identity are more desirable now than the torso pictures and anonymous profiles that were popular when these apps first started. It might be too early to speculate, but any future research should take this matrix as a starting point to observe whether these apps are still trying to 'mainstream' themselves as legitimate social media apps that insist on holistic representation. If this transformation persists, it could potentially alleviate the difficult position of ethnic gay men and marginalised gay men in general.

7.3. Research implications

This research has combined different approaches to study three distinctive but hard-to-pinpoint subjects: gay Asian migrants, the elusive gay community, and the ever-changing mobile dating apps. The mixed methods used throughout this research are helpful to produce an overall picture of the lived experience of gay Asian migrants in the local gay community through the use of these three apps; however, a few limitations are to be expected in a study that has well-defined boundaries.

First, throughout the course of this project, the three apps that I have been studying have gone through many changes. In addition, other apps in the market have also gone through similar transformations. The changes of these apps could range from rebranding, to redesigning their interface designs, to the change in political economy and ownership structure of the app developers' company. To name a few instances of these changes, Blued has rebranded itself into a video streaming app that focuses on users streaming live videos of themselves to others; Jack'd has updated its user interface gradually; Grindr has been sold to a Chinese media company based in Beijing, and is now currently in turmoil due to worries about user data being misappropriated by the Chinese government. In the latest turn of events, the Chinese media company that currently owns Grindr has been instructed by the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) to sell the app by 2020. These series of changes, ranging from redesigns to large impactful events like the change of business ownership, will have profound impacts on what these apps can or cannot become. To give an example, when Grindr was first sold to Beijing Kunlun in 2016, the company named as its CEO a heterosexual Chinese man who is against same-sex marriage. Grindr and Beijing Kunlun thus faced backlash

from the gay community from users who were concerned that a heterosexual Chinese man has limited interest in and understanding of the gay community, and may turn the app into something that works against the interests of the gay community. Presently, because of the tense US and China trade war that has resulted in the ownership of Grindr being demanded back by the United States, we are unable to see or to speculate about whether Grindr will continue to pursue a shift toward being a lifestyle app; however, it will be intriguing to examine how Grindr undergoes another phase of transformation if and when the 2020 change of ownership happens.

Second, this research has only managed to examine three apps in the market, selected on the basis of their popularity in New Zealand, but therefore tied to one location specifically. In addition to that, these three apps are examined in the context of Auckland only, which is the city centre that houses more than a quarter of the overall population of New Zealand. In short, these perspectives and experiences are entrenched in urban living experiences that could be very different in other locations (e.g. smaller urban centres or rural locations). In relation to population size, New Zealand's relatively small gay population size is also a limitation, since that by definition means a smaller sample size. At the same time, however, this thesis has managed to focus on a very specific group, a minority within a minority community of a small but globalised country, which opens up dialogue about the contested globalised gay identity that is common across the world but continues to marginalise those who have little choice but to adapt to it. It is also worthwhile to point out that not all the interviewees that this research has come across experience oppression on these apps in the same way. As pointed out in Chapter Six, intersectionality is needed to better understand how each user experiences these apps; moreover, the diverse background of the interviewees also means that they are subjected to different circumstances as presented on these apps. Future research should consider examining different subsections of Asian identities to understand their user experience of these apps better. .Although these apps have promoted a model of gay sexuality that can be mimicked and replicated in places where homosexuality is suppressed by state sanction or denied culturally, this westernised version of gay sexuality that supposedly offers empowerment and liberation becomes the very constraint that disempowers ethnic gay men who attempt to model themselves on it. If and when these gay men become migrants to places where this westernised gay sexual identity is the default, such as New Zealand, then they may well experience wider social acceptance but still struggle with exclusion from the local gay community. My research findings as well as the interview participants' experiences are on par with other research that has been conducted overseas, such as Australia (Caluya, 2006; Han, 2006; Payne, 2007; Riggs, 2013; Ridge et al., 1999), citing similar experiences and issues that plague ethnic gay men in a predominately White gay community. At the same

time, my research has shown that there is hope that the sexual racism promoted by these apps, even with the best intentions, is beginning to be reconfigured.

7.4. Future directions

This project has only managed to capture what is a relatively small fraction of these ever-changing apps and their relationship to the gay community as well as their users. Many other aspects could be considered by any similar future research, which would continue to enrich this particular field of study.

Firstly, although this research has presented a well-documented experience of gay Asian migrants, it has never claimed to represent these experiences as similar or reproducible across every other community of ethnic gay men. This arises from careful consideration of the insights from discourses of intersectionality, according to which different ethnicities and social positions can have a profound impact on the experience one has on these platforms. In other words, a gay Black man or a gay Latino man will have a very different experience than a gay Asian man, despite their being categorised similarly as ethnic gay men. Furthermore, the experience will differ as well between a gay Asian man who was born in New Zealand and a gay Asian migrant who arrived in the country not long ago.

Secondly, while I have attempted a five-year cross-section of activity on three gay mobile dating apps, scholars should continuous to track the trajectory of the desire and beauty standards of the gay community to assess the position of marginalised ethnic gay men. Although this research has captured important aspects of the current norms of desirability in the gay community that are based on pornography tropes and westernised standards of beauty, it would be beneficial to further examine the impact of transnational migration and how that could potentially affect these standards, even challenging them and changing the position of other ethnic gay men in the gay community.

Thirdly, the experience of other ethnic gay men aside from gay Asian men should be examined to provide a well-rounded perspective of the intersections between ethnicity, gay sexuality and mobile dating apps in general. With that being said, future research in this area should also consider examining different types of migrants (be they short-term or long-term migrants, or second generation migrants that migrate with their family) and how that could potentially impact their experience.

Lastly, a specific comparative study between two different localities with the same app would be useful to define in more granular terms the differences of how these apps function in different localities. Such a study would deepen understanding of gay ecologies in different countries and societies. As this research has been limited to looking at the apps' usage in one particular locality, a comparative approach could tease out more distinctive differences that debunk a universalised gay identity.

7.5. Future recommendations for apps

As discussed in Chapter Six, although the three apps that I have examined provide a certain degree of customisability for users to create their profile, they have yet to figure out the intersectional relationship between various identity customisations. This in turn has profound impacts on users' self-representation, such as the isolated ethnic selection drop-down menu that reduces users into a finite set of recognisable categories. I suggest that these apps should allow users to write freely on their user profile (that is, by providing more spaces and greater word allowance) instead of providing restrictive and limiting selections that are divorced from the complex realities of identity politics.

In addition, these apps should redesign their interfaces so that they will be pertinent and relevant to different gay ecologies around the world. If the drop-down selection menu is here to stay, then I would suggest the selections should be broadened or tailored to suit each local gay ecology. For instance, the label of sexual positions could change to accommodate the different understanding of sex according to the location in which an app is used.

Although these apps are rebranding themselves as social media apps and hence positioning themselves 'out in the open', they should reconsider their position when it comes to different countries that still condemn homosexuality, where the 'out and proud' design of the apps could pose very real risks to their users. Of the three apps that I have examined, Grindr is the only app that offers its user a unique function whereby users can change the app icon on their phone into something else that is more discreet. This is, of course, a feature that users will have to pay for. I would recommend that such a critical function which protects vulnerable individuals to be made free and available across all gay mobile dating apps.

7.6 Concluding reflections

This research started off as an inquiry into the current state of New Zealand's gay community as highly dependent on gay mobile dating apps, and what this means for marginalised gay Asian migrants who are using these apps to integrate into their host country as well as the gay community. Furthermore, I wanted to understand the relationship between gay mobile dating apps and the gay community, in relation to their roles in gay Asian migrants' lived experience in New Zealand. This research initially aimed to elucidate how these apps could be a useful tool for gay Asian migrants to settle into their host country by helping them to find a sense of sexual belonging in the gay community. In the process, however, this research has shown that finding a sense of sexual belonging is not as simple as joining an intangible and elusive gay community; rather, it is about the gay community and its members coming to acknowledge, accept, and embrace different ways of practicing and representing sexuality than those found in the westernised framework that is the cultural heritage of postcolonial New Zealand. Through studying the designs of the three apps chosen for this project (namely Grindr, Jack'd, and Blued), analysing their user-generated content (100 profiles across the three apps), and conducting interviews with gay Asian migrants who are using these three apps, this research has provided one of the few studies of gay Asian migrants and their lived experience interwoven with media technology and the local gay community. In doing so, this research has managed to enrich our understanding of how ethnicity, sexuality and digital spaces intersect with the local gay community in New Zealand by way its materialised encounters through these apps.

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Appendix A

Interview questions sample

Migration

1) Where are you originally from?

2) How long have you been in New Zealand?

3) In what ways is New Zealand similar or different to your country of origin?

4) What are your reason(s) for migrating to New Zealand in the first place?

5) Do you feel a strong or weak sense of belonging here in New Zealand so far?

Sexuality

1) Do you actively participate in the gay community in New Zealand? (If 'yes', in what ways and to what degree? If 'no', why is that so?)

2) Do you feel included/excluded by the gay community here in New Zealand?

3) Do you feel that being a gay man here in New Zealand is a similar/different experience than your country of origin?

4) What are the benefits/advantages that you have experienced so far as a gay Asian migrant in New Zealand?

5) What are the difficulties/challenges that you have experienced so far as a gay Asian migrant in New Zealand?

6) Are there any instances where you feel that your ethnicity could have contributed to the advantages/challenges to your overall experience here in New Zealand and in the gay community?

New Media (Apps)

1) What are your means of communication with other gay men other than these mobile applications?

2) Which mobile applications do you use?

3) Do you feel that there are any differences/similarities among these mobile applications?

4) How often do you use these mobile applications?

5) What is your purpose(s) for using these mobile applications?

6) Do you think these mobile applications assist (or hinder) you on fitting into the society/gay community of New Zealand? And how is that so?

7) Have these apps (in any way) assisted you in discovering your sexuality?

8) Could you describe your overall experience on these mobile dating applications?

9) Have you acquired any beneficial outcome(s) from using these applications? (Making friends, networking, finding a partner, sexual gratification and so on)?

10) Have you experienced any form of discrimination or hostility on these mobile dating applications from other users?