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Gay Immigrants and Geosocial Media

Andrew DJ Shield

'Most of my gay friends are from Grindr', reflected Ali from Iraq, who arrived in the greater Copenhagen area in 2015 as an asylum seeker. 'Actually a couple of them are really good friends. Either we dated and then became friends later or we were friends from the beginning'. Grindr – a geosocial smartphone app that lists men-seeking-men in one's exact location by order of proximity – was also the way Pejman from Iran met one of his earliest contacts in Denmark, a friend who eventually rented out his apartment to Pejman and found him a part-time job. Many users of gay dating sites blur the lines of friendship and romance when posting and responding to messages; some also discuss logistics like housing and employment or share information about local events or meeting-spaces. 'Looking for friends, dates, work', one user advertised, 'If u could help me find sth, I'd be thankful'.

For gay immigrants in particular, informal chats on gay dating platforms can be a useful way to engage initially with others in the host country and to build social and logistical networks. However there are some problems that immigrants and ethnic minorities face online, namely when encountering exclusionary or xenophobic messages. Caleb, originally from China, recurrently treads through profiles posted by men who announce that 'No Asians' need contact them. Şenol from Turkey was perplexed when an anonymous user called him a 'Turkish prostitute' before ignoring him entirely. In response to these negative experiences, both Caleb and Şenol have re-written their profile texts to address prejudicial comments on gay social media, thereby hoping to encourage users to problematise and be reflective about race-related communiqués.

As an exploratory study of recent immigrants' uses of and experiences on gay geosocial dating platforms in the greater Copenhagen area, this chapter analyses profile texts on Grindr and PlanetRomeo, and gives voice to ten recent immigrants who use these platforms. The first research question relates to the ways users form offline social networks through these media; in this regard, gay dating platforms can be viewed as 'social media' not unlike mainstream social networking sites. The second research question relates to discussions of race and exclusion online; with regard to the ways some users transform their public profiles into soapboxes to broadcast

political messages, these gay dating platforms – not unlike YouTube and Facebook – can also be spaces for social media activism (Poell & van Dijck, 2015; Raun, 2016).

Migration, Sexuality and Online Media

In the early 2000s, scholarship on immigrants' use of online media in Europe often focused on internet news and emailing – which facilitate transnational communications with the country of origin – and whether these media hindered immigrants' interest in local politics in the host country and prevented the learning of the host country's language (e.g. Karanfil, 2007). But those who focused on immigrants' use of these media to connect both transnationally and to others within Europe noted that the relationship between online media, social networks and feelings of national belonging was more complex, particularly among young immigrants and the second generation (Madianou & Miller, 2012; Mainsah, 2010; Nikunen, 2010). Following these and recent studies of race in the Nordic context (e.g. Andreassen & Vitus, 2015), this chapter foregrounds affectivity, intimacy and emotion when exploring migrants' feelings of belonging, both online and offline (Ahmed, 2004).

When the seminal texts of 'queer migration' theory were published in 2005, scholars did not yet focus on actors' online social practices and identities (Epps, Valens & González, 2005; Luibhéid & Cantú, 2005). Subsequent studies of LGBTQ migrants in Europe have focused on migrants' processes of arrival and adaptation, with some attention to internet use in countries of origin (Peumans, 2012), on the unique challenges faced by LGBTQ people of colour in majority-white societies (El-Tayeb, 2012; Jivraj & de Jong, 2011) and most recently on Belgian gay men with a migration background who use social media to find positive information on and representations of homosexuality (Dhoest, 2016). Recent reports about LGBTQ immigrants and ethnic minorities in Denmark have touched on actors' uses of social media in Denmark, namely their strategies for remaining discreet or coming out on Facebook (Følner, Dehlholm & Christiansen, 2015; Østergård, 2015). But immigrants' social practices and experiences of building networks via dating platforms, where users interact mainly with strangers, remain areas for deeper investigation.

In *Gaydar Culture: Gay Men, Technology and Embodiment in the Digital Age* (2010), Sharif Mowlabocus argues that when gay men communicate online, 'physical interaction between users is the primary motivation' (p. 15). Studies of dating announcements often centre on users' self-identifications and their descriptions of ideal partners (e.g. with regard to race: Kaufman & Phua, 2003; or gay masculinity: Light, 2013). Drawing from Nicholas Boston's study of Polish immigrants in the UK who seek same-sex relationships with black locals on PlanetRomeo – a study that also connects sexuality studies, migration studies and online media – this chapter

demonstrates how online communication between gay immigrants and locals can 'figure in processes of migrant adaptation and identity formation' (Boston, 2015, p. 293) in the greater Copenhagen area.

The empirical material in this chapter comes from my database of over 600 Grindr and PlanetRomeo profiles and semi-structured interviews with ten recent immigrants about their uses of gay social media, both collected in late 2015 and early 2016. The database includes both screen-grabs of profiles (tagged with time and location) and a spreadsheet with users' selections from various drop-down menus as well as references to migration status, race, jobs or housing. On weekday evenings, I recorded the data of all Grindr users within specific radii of Copenhagen centre (a high-traffic area with many hotels and gay establishments), Northwest Copenhagen (a neighbourhood characterised in part by decades of immigration) and Roskilde/Taastrup (suburbs with long immigrant histories). In each of these three locations, non-white users represented 12–14% of those on Grindr, though quantitative analysis is not central to this chapter. Extensive evaluation of profile texts allowed not only for discursive analysis but also for virtual ethnographic observations (Hine, 2000), as users updated their texts and interacted with me via private messages. Conscious of the ethics of internet research (Markham & Buchanan, 2015), I have removed all profile names.

By giving primacy to the voices of the users on the platforms, these profiles – as the primary sources for this chapter – show an appreciation for historical studies 'from below' that focus on the lives of common people (e.g. Thompson, 1966), as well as for feminist histories that explore gender, sexuality and race (e.g. Andreassen, 2015; Higginbotham, 1992; Stoler, 2010), which have encouraged me to foreground intersectionality in my research questions (Crenshaw, 1989). This research is also indebted to historical studies that use personal ads in order to understand dating and social networks (Cocks, 2009). Thus the conclusion utilises another source base: several hundred personal ads printed in Danish gay/lesbian journals in the 1970s, adapted from my dissertation research (Shield, 2015, pp. 279–311). In order to historicise my arguments about practices online, the conclusion compares and contrasts today's social trends with the practices of those who placed dating ads in the 1970s.

Interviewees mainly responded to announcements made on my researcher profiles on Grindr and PlanetRomeo, in which I identified myself as a scholar investigating the various uses of gay dating platforms, particularly newcomers' experiences. Additionally, I met three of the interviewees at public LGBTQ-themed events in Copenhagen. Drawing from anthropological imperatives of self-reflexivity in the field (Markham, 2013), I am aware that I often sympathised with the positions of my informants due in part to my own subject positions (Hesse-Biber, 2006; Sundén, 2012), but I aimed to remain critical in my analyses of the semi-structured interviews, which I recorded, transcribed and critiqued for discourses and narrative framings (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Silverman, 2006).

The chapter refers to 'immigrants' who migrated and often received legal status through a variety of channels; the term 'newcomers' in this chapter refers also to internal (e.g. rural-to-urban) migrants and some tourists. My immigrant interviewees, who ranged in age from 23 to 40, arrived as students (two of them), by seeking asylum (two), through green card schemata (two), by getting a job (one) or through family reunification (one); the remaining two (both students) had European citizenship and could move freely within the EU. Non-European interviewees came from Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Turkey and China. All names, and some other identifying details, have been changed. All live in 'the greater Copenhagen area', which for the purposes of this chapter includes Malmö, Sweden (i.e. the Øresund region), where a few of the interviewees were based.

The chapter refers to 'gay' online platforms and users, although this term is imprecise as it oversimplifies the variety of ways users on these platforms identify (e.g. as bisexual, queer, straight or as one interviewee said, 'situationally' gay). While all of the interviewees identified as male, some users of these platforms are trans-women or non-binary. Unfortunately, the dating profiles and experiences of lesbian, bisexual, queer women and many gender-non-conforming people are not represented on these platforms or in this chapter.

Debuting in 2009 alongside the boom in smartphones, Grindr utilises a phone's global positioning system (GPS) to mark a user's location relative to other users. Since its first version, Grindr has permitted one profile photo, a short text (c. 50 words) and answers to a few drop-down menus such as age, height, weight, 'ethnicity' (a category problematised in this chapter) and 'looking for'. This simple format allowed Grindr to stand out from computer-centred dating profiles such as PlanetRomeo that did not limit users' photos or profile texts. Founded in 2002 in Germany, PlanetRomeo (originally called GayRomeo) took advantage of the web's affordances (i.e. unlimited space, advanced search abilities) and encouraged users to identify with dozens of drop-down menus, including gender/sexual orientation, safer sex strategies, fetishes, religion, 'ethnicity' (albeit with different options than on Grindr) and user-submitted location. Following the successes of Grindr and Scruff (a similar app), PlanetRomeo has since launched a GPS-based mobile version. According to their company websites, Grindr and PlanetRomeo each have 1–2 million active daily users worldwide, foremost in the United States and Germany/Austria, respectively; most features can be accessed for free on both platforms (Grindr, 2015; PlanetRomeo, 2015).

'Sometimes the Lines Are Not So Clear': Blurring the Sexual, Platonic and Logistical

Although platforms like Grindr and PlanetRomeo are often characterised as 'hook-up' applications that connect users primarily for sex (Race, 2015), there are a significant number of men who use these platforms for platonic

connections (Katyal, 2011, p. 134; Race, 2014, p. 498–499), as shown in the following Danish ads:

Au: [coffee emoji] will be removed

> Looking for friends, fun and a gym partner. (Grindr)
> Coffee is a great start ☕ [coffee emoji]. (Grindr)
> You will find a loyal, faithful friend in me. (PlanetRomeo)

A tally of profiles in central Copenhagen and Roskilde/Taastrup reveals some interesting trends: among Grindr users who selected what they were 'Looking for' from the all-that-apply checklist, the most commonly selected option was 'Friends' (over 'Dating', 'Relationship', 'Right now', etc.). Of 175 profiles which selected at least one desired interaction type, 126 (72%) included friendship among other possibilities and five users (3%) sought friendship solely.

Newcomers are no exception among those open to friendship. Perhaps as a strategy to stand out from the regular users in the area, tourists often change their display name to 'Visitor' or 'Hotel', or include explanations of their visit and how long they will stay. Similarly many recent immigrants introduce themselves as 'New in town'. In one tally of 140 Grindr profiles signed into central Copenhagen, ten of the users announced themselves as tourists and another ten as other newcomers. The latter did so in a variety of ways:

> New in town don't know anybody. Wanna meet up for a drink or something? (Grindr)
> Native English speaker. Just moved to Denmark. Show me a good time. (Grindr)
> I'm new to Copenhagen. Be nice. (Grindr)
> From Asia, relocated to Europe… (Grindr)

As the first two profiles show, newcomers are often explicit about their interest in making friends and can be eager for information about the city. These profiles demonstrate that many members of sexual minorities trust that a shared sexual identity, regardless of the promise of sex, might enable an intimate connection with a 'local'.

Yet not all immigrants, for example some LGBTQ asylum seekers, specify their immigration status in their profiles; they might instead introduce themselves as students and tourists so as to avoid confronting prejudicial notions about refugees. 'When someone asks, "Where are you from?", I reply, "Why does that matter?"', Ali from Iraq asserted. 'If you need to know what languages I speak, ask me that instead'.

Despite some anxieties, Ali had many positive experiences chatting and meeting with new people on Grindr, as the opening quotation in this chapter showed. In contrast, he has not made friends through more mainstream dating apps: 'I haven't met a lot of people through Tinder. But those I met were

for dates and it didn't continue on to become friends'. Şenol from Turkey had similar experiences expanding his social network through Grindr: 'One of my best friends I met on Grindr. We started chatting and then we met up'. But Şenol did not think most people on Grindr favoured friendship over sex. '[It's] maybe both. Sometimes the lines are not so clear. Maybe the first thing that comes to mind is sex or dating. But in this case', where Şenol met one of his best friends, 'I thought: "He's interesting, he seems to do nice things in life, let's get a beer" and then it became a friendship'.

Although many users welcome friends via gay dating platforms, some expressed irritation that these friendships were the by-product of failed attempts at dating. Caleb, originally from China, was grateful for the many friendships he made through Grindr and PlanetRomeo but was sceptical that the platforms could actually match him with a boyfriend. Reflecting on his frustrations with these platforms, Caleb announced in our interview that he would delete his profiles in order to focus on other methods of finding a steady partner.

Especially in the later summer, before universities and other educational institutions begin a new semester, many ads can be found related to housing for newcomers. On PlanetRomeo, where profile text is not limited, users take the opportunity to introduce themselves and describe their housing needs; yet even on Grindr users still ask for help finding a place to live:

> Hey, I just moved to Copenhagen for my master studies. Looking forward to meeting new people and finding a place to stay… I try my luck here. Is there anyone with a room to rent?… I am the perfect roommate ☺. (PlanetRomeo)
>
> I am new in CPH so I am open to new adventures and also for some accommodations ☺ so if anyone has any offers I will be more than happy to hear… (PlanetRomeo)
>
> Currently looking for a room. Hit me up if you can offer anything ☺ Expat… (Grindr)

Those looking for a room on gay dating platforms trust they will find someone with whom they presumably share many interests, including a sexual identity. There are also some posts by those offering housing; one Dane wrote that he had a 'room to rent out… do you need a place to live?' But by writing only in Danish, he limited the pool of potential flat mates.

Asen, originally from Bulgaria, highlighted 'Looking for a room' on both Grindr and PlanetRomeo for over ten months, without success. Ideally he hoped someone would offer him an alternative to his student housing, but the few who messaged him about housing either offered to 'keep an eye out', provided a room which did not meet his criteria or wrote 'borderline sexual' messages, which turned him off from the housing offers. Although Asen was happy to post profiles that sought sex, friendship and a flat mate, he did not seek to blur the lines of sex/friendship with his flat

mate. Despite many users' optimism at finding a flat mate via these dating platforms – something shared also by Caleb from China and Angelos from Greece – their success rate was lower than with other 'mainstream' housing platforms.

But Pejman from Iran found not only housing but also employment through a contact on Grindr. In 2013, shortly after arriving in Denmark, he wrote to someone on Grindr who was also Iranian: 'We met and made friendship, and after a few weeks I asked him if he knew someone that I can rent a flat or a room from'. Coincidentally the Iranian friend was looking to move out of his apartment and asked Pejman if he wanted to take it over. He did and he has lived there ever since. 'A few months later he introduced me to his boss', Pejman continued, 'and I got a part-time job', where he still works in 2016. Yet while Grindr was the technology that introduced the two contacts, it did not play a direct role in matching Pejman to a house or job; physical contact necessitated the building of a more 'traditional' social network that assisted with these practical logistics.

'I would rather look for jobs the right way', Angelos from Greece opined, naming a few mainstream job websites where he hoped to find an employer. To him, announcing that one sought work on Grindr or PlanetRomeo gave the impression that 'any job will do'. Like the men who offered Asen a room with sexual strings, some respondents might offer Angelos employment with sexual undertones. To the post-graduate the blurring of sex and employment represented the 'wrong' way to seek a job.

Immigrants from areas where sex work is more prominently found on these platforms would associate an announcement for 'a job' with sex work. Yet in the greater Copenhagen area only a handful of profiles offer or solicit sexual services for money, usually inconspicuously and alongside emojis with international monetary symbols (e.g. 💵💸). Even though it is legal to offer sexual services in both Denmark and Sweden, these profiles risk being flagged by the online community and having the administrators delete them.

Despite or due to this ambiguity with job-seeking on gay social media, one finds users who seek job leads:

> Looking for a cleaning job, if u need it, i would do my best 🙏💗, also wanna make friends and have a date 💍👫💋 … (Grindr)
>
> Brazilian looking for a friend, husband… A job would also be very helpful… I want a nice, sweet, generous caring older man… who would like to have a boyfriend live with him… (PlanetRomeo)

The first ad, which indicated that the user spoke a little Danish ('lidt 🇩🇰'), from which one could infer that he was a recent immigrant learning the language, does not address transactional sex. The second ad was more ambiguous: elsewhere in his profile the user offered to 'show off' his body

in exchange for housing and thus for financial support. Like the Grindr post cited at the end of this chapter's first paragraph, these ads blurred their announcements for 'friends, dates, work'.

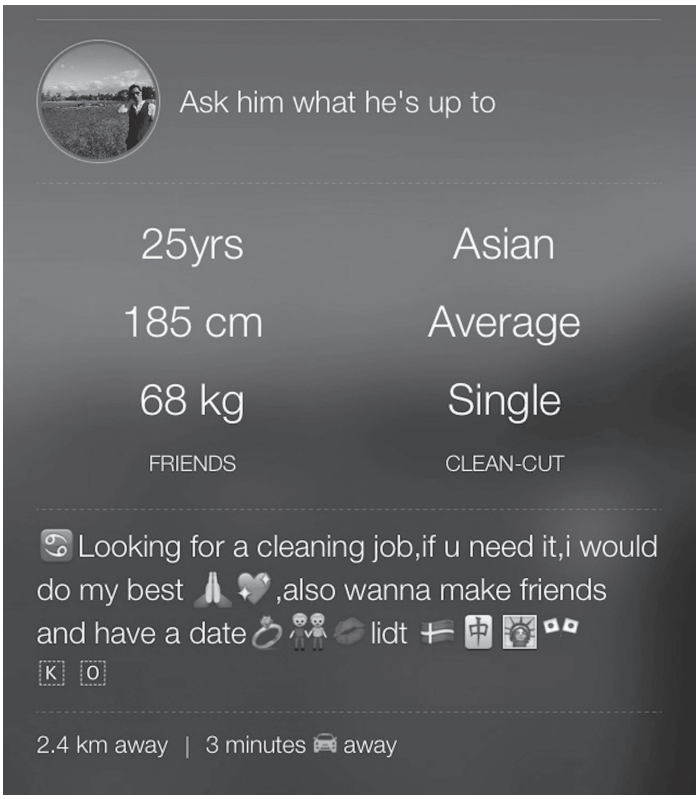

Figure 14.1 This recent immigrant squeezed an announcement seeking a job, friends, and a date into one short Grindr profile. (Printed with permission from user.)

A final practical purpose of gay dating profiles is learning local information about a host country, including its subcultures, for people with minority expressions of sexual orientation or gender identity; in other words, users can gain 'cultural capital' on these platforms (Bourdieu, 2011 [1985]). Gay social media becomes a casual first step into conversations about LGBTQ identities and subcultures. Due to the informal nature of these chats, foreign users often feel comfortable practising their English, Danish or Swedish, while at the same time gaining insider knowledge about vocabularies, physical spaces and social practices of LGBTQ people in the greater Copenhagen area.

In the Country of Origin: Potential Immigrants and Online Speculation

Studies on gay social media in Tunis (Collins, 2012), Beirut (Gagné, 2012) and other cities with stricter laws and social regulations against public homosexuality have shown that digital technologies can be central to the formation of sexual and gender identities, and can connect users to a community of sexual minorities online and offline. In his dissertation about PlanetRomeo in India, Akhil Katyal (2011) also briefly explored the opportunities which gay dating platforms presented to same-sex-desiring men in rural areas who moved to cities like Delhi based on their positive experiences chatting online.

Interviewees from Egypt, Iran, Iraq and Turkey were all active with online communities for men-seeking-men in their countries of origin, via Grindr, PlanetRomeo and ManJam, a website popular among Arabic, Persian and Urdu speakers. Ali used Grindr in Iraq from 2010–2014 and described it as 'the main way to meet other people' and to get to 'know more about your sexuality'. However he acknowledged that many Iraqis feel insecure on gay dating platforms: a user never knows if he is chatting with someone who intends to threaten or blackmail him. For this reason Parvin never shared photos in Iran, even though he interacted with other Iranian men-seeking-men via Yahoo Messenger since 2005, some of whom used webcams. Parvin also chatted anonymously through a secondary profile on Facebook he made exclusively for cruising men. 'There are lots of them', he said about men with secondary Facebook profiles in Iran. 'I have about 600 friends' on that profile, none of whom he had met in real life.

Importantly, many gay dating platforms – PlanetRomeo, Scruff, ManJam, etc. – allow for international correspondence, which means that users can read the profiles and chat with men in Denmark, Sweden or another country to which they might relocate. In his study of Poles on PlanetRomeo in the UK, Nicholas Boston (2015) referred to the 'speculators' still living in Poland who cruised British profiles while considering a move or visit to the UK. While still living in Turkey, Şenol learned about Qruiser, a Swedish gay dating platform: 'I made a profile on Qruiser and made some friends, so when I came over we started hanging out actually, so it was great'. Other interviewees mentioned changing their PlanetRomeo profile locations to Denmark and Sweden to browse prior to moving there.

To sum up: in addition to the various sexual, platonic and logistical ways in which gay social media can assist immigrants in new countries – for example in finding friends, jobs, housing and information about LGBTQ subcultures – gay dating platforms can also help potential immigrants worldwide build social networks to assist with international migration and adaptation processes abroad.

'No Racist Guys Pls!': Encountering and Combating Prejudice

Although dating sites and apps can be a useful way to build social and logistical networks in the (future) country of settlement, immigrants (and ethnic minorities more generally) also face obstacles, more particularly when encountering exclusionary or xenophobic messages. On Grindr in Denmark the most commonly targeted group for ethnic/racial exclusion is Asians, with about one in every hundred profiles writing something along the lines of 'NOT into Asiens [sic]' or 'I apologise but Asians is a polite "no thank you"'. David Eng (2001) has described these speech patterns in psychoanalytic terms as the 'castration' of Asian men in white-majority societies, repetitions that negatively affect feelings of belonging to a gay or sexual community (see also Gosine, 2007; Peumans, 2014; as well as Douchebagsofgrindr.com in Woo, 2013). These exclusionary posts left a negative impression on many interviewees, especially Caleb from China: 'I don't want someone to have a fixed impression of me… You shouldn't need that to prove yourself to people'.

Yusuf from Egypt, who identifies as black, has also felt targeted on Grindr. 'You are close', a nearby user wrote to him one evening; Yusuf responded in the affirmative. The man continued: 'Are you a taxi driver?' The offhand comment about Yusuf's purported profession, with its implications about class and servitude, left Yusuf sickened. Yet he has also received half a dozen other offensive messages over the past two years, from slave jokes to being called an 'idiot'. These experiences show how immigrants and racial minorities can be targeted with public and private utterances – from racial-sexual preferences to hurtful jokes – which reinforce white associations between race and belonging in the gay community (see also Jivraj & de Jong, 2011; El-Tayeb, 2012).

When reading public statements about racial-sexual preferences, some feel indirectly targeted: 'I have not seen a profile that said "No Middle Eastern" or "No Muslims"', Ali remarked, but that did not make him feel better about the exclusionary posts he found against Asian, Indian and sometimes black men. Parvin from Iran felt that his ethnicity and status as a foreigner affected his popularity on Grindr: 'When I send more than 100 messages and no one responds, it must be some problem', he began. 'Am I so unfit in this society? Am I so ugly? What is the problem?' Feelings of rejection on gay dating platforms can exacerbate anxieties about belonging or exclusion more generally.

A study of dating ads in the United States in 2003 found that explicit references to racial-sexual preferences were quite common in men-for-men ads and were by no means limited to white men. Explicit references to race were indeed more common among black, Latino and Asian men-seeking-men, ranging from those who said they were only interested in their own race/ethnicity to those who were only interested in another specific race/ethnicity or those who stated they were open to all men in general. Kaufman and

Phua underscored that white men were not more likely to be 'colour-blind', even though they often ignored race in their ads; rather, many white users assumed 'a person of another race would not respond to them because of cultural differences and/or lack of encouragement' (2003, p. 984). In other words, white men who do not specify race in their ideal partner(s) assume that others will read the unmarked race as white (see also Blaagaard & Andreassen, 2012, p. 82).

Drop-down menus encourage users to identify by 'Ethnicity' (the preferred term on Grindr, PlanetRomeo, Scruff) by presenting the category alongside seemingly self-evident categories such as age, height and weight. Reflecting dominant US-American labels, Grindr and Scruff offer the racial identities 'White' and 'Black' as well as regional options like 'Middle Eastern' and one blanket category for 'Mixed' (Grindr) or 'Multi-Racial' (Scruff). Reflecting dominant German categorisations, PlanetRomeo offers the colour 'Black' but divides those of white European descent between 'Caucasian' and 'Mediterranean', the latter of which presumably excludes those who qualify under the ethno-linguistic category 'Arab'. On Qruiser (Swedish), whites are further subdivided into five regions – Northern, Southern, Eastern, Western or Central Europeans – under the category 'Looks and origin', while those with non-European backgrounds can choose from categories like 'African' and 'Middle East'. The Danish LGBTQ platforms Boyfriend and Girlfriend eschew ethnic/racial drop-down menus.

'What do I say? Asian? What's East? Who says that it's East?', laughed Parvin as he reviewed the Grindr labels. In Iran he was accustomed to identifying himself and his neighbours with labels like Iranian, Afghani or Azerbaijani. 'It's not like when you're in the Middle East it's one race. But now [here in Denmark] I'm "Middle Eastern"'. Boston also noted how immigrants in the UK incorporated PlanetRomeo's categories into their daily speech: 'Online, I'm usually looking for South Asian…, Arab, black and mixed-race', one Polish interviewee told Boston, who in turn noted that these terms corresponded to the 'preprogrammed options in the drop-down menu' (2015, pp. 304–305).

Choosing or eschewing the ethnicity drop-down was a matter of deep reflection for Ali: 'That's a very political power dynamic that I really don't want to support'. Şenol from Turkey, like Ali, refused to select an ethnicity on his online profiles: 'I don't believe in that. It doesn't make any sense to me'. Şenol linked these drop-down menus to the practice of announcing racial-sexual exclusions: 'Racism in the gay community is quite visible, and people get away with it because they say it's a preference… So I don't want to put that ["ethnicity" selection]'. The creators of these technologies, in tandem with the social practices of some users, reinforce hegemonic notions of racial difference online, which cannot be untied from their sociopolitical implications offline.

Having painted a picture of gay social media as a space overrun with problematic statements about race, this next section uncovers some of the techniques employed by users of these platforms to increase self-reflexivity or to shame those who post exclusionary messages.

'Dating based on racial preferences is racist', Caleb, originally from China, writes on his PlanetRomeo profile. 'Same goes for all races who prefer dating only one or a couple races, whether you like the argument or not. This is an uncomfortable topic for many, but it is a big challenge everywhere'. Caleb takes advantage of the extended space on PlanetRomeo to share his opinions on 'sexual racism' as well as links to blog posts on the topic (e.g. Allen, 2015). Reflecting on his decision to post these links, Caleb felt that Danes and Swedes were less accustomed to discussing race than for example US Americans: 'People are embarrassed to talk about their prejudice… They feel they can't be open about it, people will judge them. Not that they are more racist [than in the United States]', he asserted, but mainly 'I want people to think about it'.

Even within the limited space of Grindr profiles, users of various backgrounds will speak out against racial exclusions and other forms of prejudice, as the following Copenhagen-area profiles show:

> Foreigner… seeks chemistry. No racist guys pls! We are one big society. Everyone deserves to be happy :-) (Grindr)
>
> Ageism, fat shaming, racism and discrimination against feminine boys = go away! (Grindr)
>
> Please quit the nazi-aged rage!!! I don't fucking care!!!… where are all the Asians? (Grindr)
>
> I do not discriminate towards race or religion! All welcome and it does not matter if you are green, yellow, black… muslim, christian… (PlanetRomeo)

Şenol from Turkey recounted that a friend of his announced in his profile, 'Do not contact me unless you are an anti-racist feminist'. These statements counter hegemonic understandings of 'race' and 'sexual preference' circulated by other users on the shared interface, and demonstrate how gay profiles can be spaces for activism online.

'Those who write something inclusive, either they have experienced that [racism] first hand or they work with it', Ali asserted. He appreciated profiles that urged users, 'Don't say what you're *not* interested in, say what you *are* interested in', or else, 'I'm looking for someone I'm attracted to, not someone from a certain background'. Ali acknowledged that people might have their own specific preferences but felt these preferences often could be phrased in more positive ways. Altogether these users transform their dating profiles into soapboxes from which to broadcast messages of tolerance which could influence future users' communiqués on these platforms.

Historically Informed Conclusions

This chapter shows that immigrants utilise social media technologies – including dating profiles for gay/bisexual men and some gender-non-conforming people – as a means of developing social networks in, and

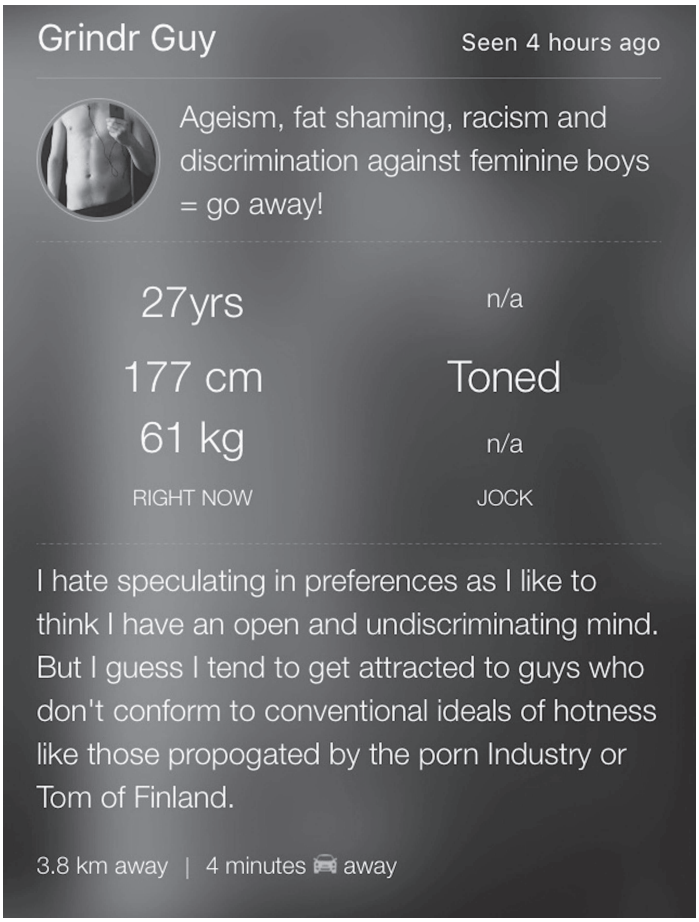

Figure 14.2 A Grindr user turns his profile into a soapbox to critique 'ageism, fat shaming, racism' and other problems he encounters on Grindr and offline. (Printed with permission from user.)

insider knowledge about, the greater Copenhagen area. Connecting to both locals and other immigrants in the host country, immigrants on Grindr or PlanetRomeo demonstrate that cultural immersion and adaptation involve not only government social services, community organisations and/or trade unions (e.g. Ager & Strang, 2008) but also individual and informal initiatives online.

These findings – foremost about the blurring of sexual, platonic and logistical announcements, but also about practices discussing race and belonging – must be qualified with two caveats. Firstly, one must not conclude that these findings are unique to Scandinavia, or even Europe. The ways immigrants use gay dating profiles in Denmark or Sweden do

not differ greatly from the ways they used social media – even 'gay' social media – in their countries of origin. Thus, even if their abilities to use these technologies were limited by laws against homosexuality, it would be unwise to overemphasise a 'liberation narrative' (Lubhéid & Cantú, 2005) when describing immigrants' technological practices in Scandinavia. Secondly, one should not relegate these findings to the digital age. How locals and immigrants use gay online platforms does not differ significantly from many of the practices of people in the 1970s who printed dating ads in gay/lesbian magazines. Those working in communication history warn against overemphasising that new technologies necessarily bring about new social practices (Humphreys, forthcoming; Shield, 2015, pp. 263–264), so this final section provides food for thought from the archives of LGBT Denmark (originally called Foundation of 1948).

During the 1970s – the decade of radicalisation of gay, lesbian and feminist movements across much of Western Europe and North America – men and women submitted contact ads to gay/lesbian printed periodicals such as *Pan*, which was published by Europe's second postwar 'homophile' group, the (Danish) Foundation of 1948 (Edelberg, 2014a, 2014b; von Rosen, 1994). There were many obstacles in this communication: long time lags, limited privacy (when receiving letters at a shared address) and moderate costs (e.g. stamps, photo prints, private post office boxes). Nevertheless, *Pan* printed dozens of personal ads per issue from 1971–1977, and the following analysis looks at all 250 ads from selected spring/fall issues. 43 of these, or 17%, sought or offered housing and jobs.

As with dating profiles today, the lines between sexual, platonic and logistical ads sometimes blurred: one man posted (in Danish) 'for renting a house, and maybe erotic relationship' (*Pan* 4:1974), while another said he 'just bought a house in the country [with] tons of space', where he sought 'a young man to share the house with me' (*Pan* 6:1975). Whereas the first man sought a paying housemate who might occasionally or eventually desire sex together, the latter hoped his offer for free housing would entice a young man to move in with him and perhaps start a relationship. Though these housing offers might have been unstable, they could still be alluring for those with limited capital. Overall, the variety of ads printed in *Pan*, an archetypical 1970s gay/lesbian magazine, shows that the periodical was a 'social media', similar to Grindr or PlanetRomeo, which allowed readers occupying various social positions to interact with others who shared not only a sexual identity but also presumably other interests.

The majority of 'white' men in the 1970s did not identify with this label; one would instead assume that whoever posted a Scandinavian-language profile without racial markers had Nordic ethnicity. There were however a handful of people of colour who posted personal ads. (*Pan* was not the only magazine in Denmark with gay personal ads; there was also the pornographic *Eos*, which was one of the first legal explicit magazines for gay men

and boasted the 'world's largest collection of personal ads', with around 350 per issue.) To provide just one example:

> [in English] COPENHAGEN, DK. Lonely young man from Asia, slim, discret [sic] and sincere, resident in Copenhagen, seeks good-looking friends in Europe. Correspondence also welcomed… Would also like weekend job for pasttime, perhaps as model. Have good face and profile.
>
> (*Eos* 1:1970)

Noteworthy here is not only that the gay 'scene' in Copenhagen already included some ethnic minorities in 1970, but also that newcomers had faith that the gay community would identify with and assist them. Not unlike the young Asian man on Grindr who posted for a cleaning job, friends and a wedding ring in Denmark, this newcomer hoped that a local social network could assist with both friendship and finances.

Finally, some users corresponded internationally in the 1970s through *Pan*, including some 'speculators' who hoped to move to Scandinavia. Approximately 16% of *Pan*'s advertisements in the 1970s came from outside of Scandinavia (as did half of the ads in *Eos*). Explicit about his desire to meet someone who could help him move, one man in Kenya posted three different times about his desire to migrate:

> [in English] KENYA: Afro-arab… wants to get in touch with friend of good will for assistance in travelling to Europe and getting settled there…
>
> (*Pan* 5:1972; see also *Pan* 5:1973, 9:1973)

Having somehow acquired a copy of a Danish-language magazine for gay/lesbian activists in Scandinavia, this Kenyan man sought to use the printed advertisements as a means for immigrating to Denmark permanently. Similarly, a teacher of Mexican descent in England hoped that a Danish reader could find him a job so he could move to Denmark (*Pan* 3:1975); and in Portugal the director of a local gay rights group posted an ad (in Danish, surprisingly) on behalf of a 21-year-old 'with bartender and pharmacy experience, who would like a job in Denmark' so that he could relocate during the early years of the Third Republic (*Pan* 4:1976). Writing in the context of economic recession across Europe, these readers hoped that the printed journals could connect them to a gay/lesbian social network which would support them with the logistics of international migration, not unlike the 'speculators' on PlanetRomeo.

In sum, gay dating platforms in Denmark and Sweden serve multiple purposes outside of sexual and platonic matchmaking. As in the 1970s, today's online dating platforms connect potential and recent immigrants to locals and enable cross-cultural social networks which can assist newcomers with

friendship and logistical support. More recently in Denmark and Sweden, gay profiles have also doubled as public soapboxes from which users discuss political issues related to race and belonging, mostly in an attempt to subvert systems of power they encounter not only on these gay platforms but also in everyday life.

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LGBTQs, Media and Culture in Europe

> This collection addresses the Anglo-American bias in much LGBT media research and offers the reader a series of snapshots, both past and present, that detail how European LGBT people have used, and continue to engage with, media technologies, texts and practices. A must-read for anyone who is interested in work in this area.
>
> —*Sharif Mowlabocus, University of Sussex*

Media matter, particularly to social minorities like lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people. Rather than one homogenised idea of the 'global gay', what we find today is a range of historically and culturally specific expressions of gender and sexuality, which are reflected and explored across an ever increasing range of media outlets. This collection zooms in on a number of facets of this kaleidoscope, each chapter discussing the intersection of a particular European context and a particular medium with its affordances and limitations. While traditional mass media form the starting point of this book, the primary focus is on digital media such as SNS (Social Networking Sites), blogs and online dating sites. All contributions are based on recent, original empirical research, using a plethora of qualitative methods to offer a holistic view on the ways media matter to particular LGBTQ individuals and communities. Together the chapters cover the diversity of European countries and regions, of LGBTQ communities and of the contemporary media ecology. Resisting the urge to extrapolate, they argue for specificity, contextualisation and a provincialized understanding of the connections between media, culture, gender and sexuality.

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