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“Bears, Cubs, and Chasers: How Gay Dating Apps Facilitate In/Exclusions, Community, and Identity in the Bear Community”

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Chapter 1 A Bearish Belonging

I had no idea that the bear community even existed at the time of my coming out. I heard the term “bear¹” before as a label for a hairier or chubbier gay man but had no idea that an entire subculture existed. In his article “Grow the Beard, Wear the Costume”: Resisting Weight and Sexual Orientation Stigmas in the Bear Subculture, Patrick B. McGrady describes Bears and the Bear Community as such:

The bears are a subculture of gay men with roots in San Francisco, California, in the late 1970s and early 1980s that value larger, hirsute bodies. The bear community provides a space for some overweight gay men to resist stereotypes of being overweight and gay. According to Thoits (2011), stigma resistance is accomplished through deflecting and challenging stereotypes placed on individuals. Specific strategies include confronting inaccurate stereotypes, downplaying stigmatized attributes, defining stigmatized attributes as less discrediting, and joining social and activist groups. Alternative subcultures such as the bears arise when subordinated groups create their own forms of power and prestige (Schwalbe et al., 2000) and act as a source of validation and social support for group members (Thoits, 2011). (McGrady 1699)

Prior to my discovery of the bear community, I turned to Grindr², the most popular gay dating/hook-up app³ that I was aware of, since I was initially too intimidated to meet people in person. Despite receiving some attention and chats on Grindr, I rather quickly felt like I was trying to fit into a place where I simply did not belong. There were a lot less people like me, my body shape did not match those of any other profiles, and I felt that I was being fetishized by the people who did reach out to talk to me. This led to further confusion, frustration, sadness, and feelings of exclusion. I did not belong in the mainstream gay world that Grindr depicted. I was

¹ In gay circles, a man who is hairy and/or has facial hair, and a cuddly body. Contrasted with **twink**. See also: **Grindr Tribes**. <https://www.thepinknews.com/2017/11/27/the-ultimate-lgbt-glossary-all-your-questions-answered/#page/3>

² A social networking app for gay and bisexual men – often seen as a hook-up app.

<https://www.thepinknews.com/2017/11/27/the-ultimate-lgbt-glossary-all-your-questions-answered/#page/8>

³ “Since launching in 2009, Grindr has grown into the largest social networking app for gay, bi, trans, and queer people. We have millions of daily users who use our location-based technology in almost every country in every corner of the planet.” <https://www.grindr.com/about>

neither skinny nor muscular, I did not have six pack abs, and I did not look like the guy on the shopping bag from Abercrombie & Fitch. Once again, I recognized the same gloom and discouragement that I felt in high school. Will I ever feel comfortable in my own body? Will I ever have a romantic encounter? Using Grindr made me feel the same shame about my weight. I felt like would need to lose weight if I ever wanted to fit in, date, or have sexual experiences in the gay community.

Almost two months after my coming out (and my first experiences using Grindr), I voiced my frustrations to a fellow “big boy” acquaintance, who immediately recommended that I download an app called Growlr⁴. He said it was similar to Grindr, except that it was for bearish men like us and much less abrasive and much more welcoming than Grindr. Discovering Growlr and the Bear Community (through the people I met on Growlr referring to themselves as ‘bears’) changed my world for the better. I found a community in which I belonged, and found others like me. Initially, I could neither fathom nor comprehend this. My whole life I struggled to like my body and feel comfortable in my own skin, yet here was this utopian, subcultural, bearish world where my body was celebrated, even adored, and seen in a positive light. The longing to be included and find a sense of community is human nature. Growlr exists as an online utopia for the Bear Community. It is a place where those people who are bearish and gay or fat⁵ and gay can shine and find love, acceptance, and inclusion (since they would likely face ridicule elsewhere in the gay community). Growlr also played a significant role in helping to shape my identity as both a Bear and a gay man. Gay dating apps in general provide a critical and necessary relevance in helping to shape gay identity, experience, and desire. In the article “Constructing a Desiring User: Discourse, Rurality, and Design in Location-Based Social Networks” Jean Hardy et al. highlight the importance of online apps in the lives of gay men:

⁴ “The world’s largest social network for the bear community.” <https://www.growlrapp.com>

⁵ I would like to note that the term “fat” will be used throughout this thesis in a positive light and as an endearing term of reclamation. In her book “What We Don’t Talk About When We Talk About Fat”, Aubrey Gordon defines the term “fat” as follows: “A neutral descriptor for predominantly plus size people. While *fat* is frequently used to insult people of all sizes, many fat activists- those of us who are undeniably, indubitably fat by any measure- reclaim the term as an objective adjective to describe our bodies, like tall or short. It is used accordingly in a matter-of-fact way throughout the pages ahead. Fat stands in contrast to an endless parade of euphemisms- *fluffy*, *curvy*, *big guy*, *big girl*, *zaftig*, *big boned*, *husky*, *voluptuous*, *thick*, *heavy set*, *pleasantly plump*, *chubby*, *cuddly*, *more to love*, *overweight*, *obese*- all of which just serve as a reminder of how terrified so many thin people are to see our bodies, name the, have them” (Gordon 8).

We argue that in moments like these, wherein creators and users make particular decisions to restrict or encourage certain kinds of usage (both their own and others), a desiring user is created that in part shapes experience and use of the app. When CEO Simkhai stipulated that, “for those who live in remote areas, or in places where homosexuality is frowned upon or even illegal, these apps provide a window into a gay world” [22], he not only envisioned certain kinds of usage, but also constructed a particular kind of subject position: that of the gay user empowered to express and live his desires freely, removed from stigma and notions of illegality, anytime and anywhere. This is more than just the ad campaign of a tech company; it inscribes what it means to be gay, designed into this app and others like it. (Hardy et al. 14)

1.2 In-/Exclusionary Experiences

However, despite this positive utopia, it is important to note that exclusions can still exist amongst members of the bear community (as well as all other communities and subcultures). I find it preposterous that we as queer, gay, and bearish men, who already face discrimination in heterosexual society, feel the need to further discriminate one another in our already marginalized Bear subculture and gay community. The fire that initially fueled this frustration toward internal discrimination is the exclusionary tagline “No Fats, No Fems⁶, No Asians”, which some gays shamelessly display on their dating app biographies to exclude and deter others from reaching out. In his article “China Doll-The Experience of being a Gay Chinese”, Tony Ayres underlines the instances of exclusion discrimination he has faced as a gay, Asian man:

⁶ It is important to note the different spellings of “fem” vs. “femme” as fem belongs to the gay community and femme belongs to the lesbian community. According to dictionary.com’s Gender and Sexuality Dictionary, “A *femboy* is a slang term for a young, usually cisgender male who displays traditionally feminine characteristics. While the term can be used as an insult, some in the LGBTQ community use the term positively to name forms of gender expression” (dictionary.com). Pinknews.com describes states that a *Femme* is “a lesbian person whose appearance and behaviour are seen as traditionally feminine”. Throughout my research, I have noticed both fem and femme used interchangeably in the phrase “No Fats, No Fems, No Asians”. I will use the spelling “fem”, since it refers to the gay community. <https://www.dictionary.com/e/gender-sexuality/femboy/>
<https://www.thepinknews.com/2017/11/27/the-ultimate-lgbt-glossary-all-your-questions-answered/#page/6>

Over the years, I have experienced three typical responses on the gay scene. First, there is overt belligerence: the drunk queens who shout in my face, “Go back to your own country”; the tag line at the end of gay personal classifieds- “No Fats, Femmes or Asians”; the guys who hissed at me in the back room, “I’m not into Asians.” Still, these incidents are rare and easily dealt with. It is racism, fair and square. I shrug my shoulders, put up a barrier of condescension. It is they who have the problem, not me (Ayres 89).

Ayres is not the only member of the LGBTQ community who has faced such blatant racial discrimination. In the article “Debiasing Desire: Addressing Bias & Discrimination on Intimate Platforms” Authors Jevan Huston et al. discuss how certain dating apps allow for “positive, negating, and fetishizing” forms of discriminations to occur against gay and bi men of color, via app filters:

In the context of intimate platforms, gay and bisexual men are more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to distinguish between potential sexual or romantic partners on the basis of race or perceived racial identity [74, 75]. In a 2012 study of racialized language in user profiles on Manhunt.net (a dating website for gay and bisexual men), researchers found that racialized language is leveraged in user profiles for a variety of purposes, including negative discrimination (e.g., "No Blacks."), positive discrimination or fetishization (e.g., "Black guys are sexy."), and marketing of the self to other users [15]. (Hutson et al. 73:5)

Hutson et al. emphasize how uncannily simple technology and applications make it for one to discriminate, as well as the various forms of discrimination that can occur. Lastly, Allison Taylor analyzes the fem aspect of “No Fats, No Fems, No Asians” in her article “‘But Where are the Dates?’ Dating as a Central Site of Fat Femme Marginalisation in Queer Communities”:

The slur ‘no fats, no femmes,’ pervasive in gay male culture, highlights how oppression operates in the contexts of desire and dating. ‘No fats, no femmes,’ often followed by ‘no Asians,’ reflects fatphobic, misogynistic, femmephobic, and racist, at the very least, dating and sexual ‘preferences’ by excluding fat, femme, and Asian individuals from

consideration for dating, sex, and love (C. Han, 2008; Liu, 2015; Pyle & Klein, 2011). While the intersection of fatness and fem(me)ininity is explored via ‘no fats, no femmes,’ in the context of gay male culture, emergent scholarship suggests that antifat and femmephobic attitudes also exist in queer women’s and gender nonconforming individuals’ navigations of desire, dating, romance, and sex (Blair & Hoskin, 2015, 2016; Hoskin, 2019; Luis, 2012; Maor, 2012; Taylor, 2018). (Taylor 1)

Taylor also highlights how fatphobic and femmephobic issues not only affect gay male cultures, but also extends to queer women as well. Although each community is worthy and critical of research, I will focus on the “Fats” through the lens of the Bear Community. It is critical that we challenge this mindset and celebrate diversity and inclusion. My deepest hope is that this thesis and research helps or inspires at least one person to recognize that no matter how isolated, different, or even hopeless we feel, that there is someone out there who shares your feelings, as well as a group where for you to find belonging and inclusion. Online experiences (such as the apps) allow us to explore and engage in new experiences, find others who are like us and share similar experiences, as well as find a sense of community and belonging. In this thesis, I aim to understand others’ experiences of inclusion, exclusion, and community, via the apps, while analyzing how identity, culture, and community shape the Bear Community.

1.2 A Bearish Background: What are Bears? What Shapes their Culture, Identity, and Community?

This section will provide a brief background on a bear definition, when the community was founded, the different labels and language that exists within the community, as well as a brief look at contemporary bear pop culture. Bear Culture is undoubtedly centered around and defined by body identity, looks, and labels.

When compared to mainstream Gay Culture, the Bear Community exists as a deviant subculture. Eric Manley et al. highlight this concept in the article “Understanding the Bear Movement in Gay Male Culture: Redefining Masculinity”:

In mainstream gay culture, a toned, smooth, youthful body has become an important status symbol influencing gay men’s self-concepts (Wright, 1997; Shernoff, 2002). Bears

seem to have adopted a counter identity to this ideal and emphasize a more natural male body image, with the traditional image of the clean-cut “twink” being deemphasized or rejected (Wright, 1997). Nonetheless, gay men who identify as bears tend to be aware of the body ideals present in mainstream gay male culture. These physical ideals may have some negative effects. (Manley et al. 91)

This deviation from the gay cultural “binary” or “traditional image of the clean-cut ‘twink’” is what lays the foundation for looks and body identity in the Bear Community. Furthermore, this rejection of the mainstream and stereotypical image of a Twink allows for the Bear Community as a positive and inclusive subculture, for those who do not fit the mainstream definition of a twink.

The Bear Community celebrates looks and body identity in a very positive regard. Body diversity is lauded and there is a place for those who are outcasts, invisible, and underrepresented. Revisiting McGrady’s “Grow the Beard, Wear the Costume...”, he describes the Bear Community as follows:

The bear subculture and members of the fat pride movement provide compelling examples of how forming an alternative subculture challenges cultural ideals of sexual orientation and weight. There are networks of chubby gay men and their admirers (Suresha, 2002), and fat pride movements and publications have attempted to recast marginalized fat bodies from deviant and stigmatized to normal and more ideal (Saguy & Ward, 2011). Groups such as the bears also maintain their distinction from other groups by affirming larger bodies and defining bears as not stereotypically gay (Hennen, 2005). (McGrady 1702)

In the article “Understanding the Bear Movement in Gay Male Culture”, Eric Manley et al. further support McGrady’s description of the Bear Community:

Hence, the bear community values allowed for the creation of a welcoming and affirming community for men who previously were excluded by the norms of other groups. Tolerance of

difference became an integral part of a bear identity and often was contrasted to the competitive or acquisitional values of a mainstream culture that could foster an uncaring or superficial style of interpersonal engagement. (Manley et al. 98)

Despite the previously mentioned positive and inclusive elements of the Bear Community, there are also negative aspects within the community, which one must consider as well. These negative elements occur as a result of both heteronormative and mainstream Gay Culture's perception of fatness, the chaser and chub⁷ dynamic in the Bear Community, as well as racism.

To be fat and gay, (or a thin and gay admirer of fat gay men) creates a double marginalization. This happens as a result of the Bear Community's acceptance and celebration of physical attributes that are typically rejected by both mainstream Gay Culture and mainstream heterosexual society. Manley et al. highlight the double marginalization:

This pressure to be slim and youthful in appearance, may cause overweight gay men to feel doubly marginalized—as outcasts from both the gay community and mainstream society. The present study explores how men experience and internalize body-related attitudes within a bear community that prizes a different aesthetic of attractiveness. (Manley et al. 91-92)

In addition to (and as a result of) this double marginalization, the Bear Community also experiences further marginalization, as a result of the chaser and chub dynamic. In his book “Fat Gay Men: Girth, Mirth, and the Politics of Stigma” Jason Whitesel provides valuable insight to the marginalization, that occurs in this dynamic:

It is noteworthy that chasers, like chubs, worry about their status, but for a different reason: Their reputations can be tarnished if they are seen going out with men of larger stature. Chasers who associate with chubs may be marginally accepted within this

⁷ In 1976, a national network of “chubbies” (big men) and “chasers” (men who were sexually attracted to chubbies) emerged as a new national organization called Girth and Mirth. (Hennen 100) in “Faeries Bears and Leathermen: Men in Community Queering the Masculine”

socially “deviant” group as honorary members. However, if they were to come out as “chasers” among gay “normals,” they would likely be tainted for holding an unorthodox ideal of what constitutes an “appropriate” mate. (Whitesel 102)

As a result, chubs and chasers alike both face marginalization from both mainstream Gay Culture and mainstream heterosexual society.

Lastly, despite its origins as a group that aims to celebrate diversity, inclusion, and acceptance, the Bear Community still struggles with inclusion, particularly regarding race. In his article from bearmagazine.com “25 Years of Bear Stripes: Why Inclusion Matters in the Bear Community” Kyle Jackson highlights the Bear Community’s struggles with exclusions and racism. Jackson mentions a Bear Community Facebook page, which shamelessly depicted racist and exclusionary rhetoric:

Two years ago, the Bear community was in a bit of an uproar when attention was called to the member request form of a certain Facebook Bear community group. A statement had apparently been added after many of the members had already joined the group, causing outrage to people who were not privy of the blatant racism in the text. The statement read: “If you are Asian or African do not join the group because it will be blocked from this group.” ... And it feels even more offensive to be discriminated against in a community like the Bear community, which was basically created in order to provide space for the husky, rugged types who felt out of place in the general gay population that seemed to favor hairless pin-up boys with ripped abs as opposed to large, hairy men with big bellies, love handles and dad bods. The community was created as a result of the lack of diversity in the broader gay community. (Jackson)

As Jackson mentions above, the bear community was created due to mainstream gay culture’s lack of diversity. We must not lose sight of this. Jackson goes on to discuss the symbolic

richness of the Bear Brotherhood Flag⁸ in terms of the seven colors, which were originally created with diversity in mind:

The seven horizontal colors — Dark brown, orange/rust, golden yellow, tan, white, gray, and black — were originally designed to represent actual bear fur colors around the world, though these colors have sometimes been interpreted as a representation of the skin and hair colors of the men in the Bear community. Regardless of what the colors were specifically intended to represent, the fact of the matter is that the multiple colors were always meant as a symbol of diversity and inclusion; Bears come in all different shades and colors” (Jackson)

These colors of the Bear Brotherhood serve as both a reminder of where the Bear Community comes from and what it stands for, as well a symbol of hope for continued and improved equality, diversity, acceptance, and inclusion. Lastly, Jackson further emphasizes the significance of the Bear Brotherhood Flag as well as our critical duty (as members of the bear community) to oppose racism, oppression and prejudice:

After 25 years in existence, the Bear flag has been a symbol of diversity and inclusion, which is fundamentally what our community was built on. It is the job of the community to continue to uphold these standards, and continue to challenge bigotry, discrimination and systemic racism, not just in our community, but in the world. Anything else would go against what we stand for. (Jackson)

The Bear Community is every color and must never lose sight of its roots and values.

In his book “Faeries Bears and Leathermen: Men in Community Queering the Masculine” Peter Hennen provides an overview of the origins and history of the Bear Community:

Bear culture was born of resistance. According to historian and founding figure Les Wright (1997b, 21), in the early 1980s, men frequenting leather bars in San Francisco and

⁸ “Craig Byrnes designed it in 1995 for the International Bear Brotherhood. Its colors are to match the fur of bears living in the woods.” From <https://www.advocate.com/gay-pride-parade/36-queer-pride-flags-know#rebellitem37>

other cities began placing a small teddy bear in their shirt or hip pocket as a way of “refuting the clone colored- hanky code,” whereby gay leathermen place different colored hankies in their back pockets to signal their interest in a variety of sex practices. Not willing to be objectified and reduced to an interest in one specific sexual activity, these men sported teddy bears to emphasize their interest in a less instrumental sexuality. According to Wright (1990, 54), this was a way of saying, “I’m a human being. I give and receive affection.” (Hennen 97)

The Advocate magazine claims to have coined the term “Bear” in their July 26, 1979, issue⁹. In his article “Who's Who at the Zoo?” for the Advocate, George Mazzei defines Bears as “usually hunky, chunky types reminiscent of engineers and former football greats. They have larger chests and bellies than average, and notable muscular legs. Some Italian-American Bears, however, are leaner and smaller; it’s attitude that makes a bear” (Mazzei). In addition to this definition, Mazzei’s article goes on to list the “general characteristics” of a bear (hair, beard, laughter), “what they eat”, “mating peculiarities”, “natural habitat”, and “domestic rating”. While the definition of a Bear varies, they usually share the same element of more mass (or belly), as well as beard and hair.

Another description and definition of a bear is provided by Les K. Wright in his book *The Bear Book II: Further Readings in the History and Evolution of a Gay Male Subculture*:

The most obvious symbols of beariness-body hair and beards and burliness, traits traditionally acceptable in leathersex circles-underscore a direct sexual interest in certain physical types. Bears are self-identified as hairy and/or full-bearded, often balding, and they may describe themselves as black, brown, kodiak or polar, grizzly, teddy, or cub. Mustaches qualify as “demi-bear.” In 1989 *BEAR* magazine conducted an informal poll, asking whether a full beard, a hirsute body, or a full-figured frame were all necessary to be considered a bear. The response was anything but uniform. Each man chose to

⁹ “There seems to be some discussion about who actually coined the term “bear” as a descriptive for some gay men. Some claim it was Richard Bulger, who, along with his then-partner, Chris Nelson (1960-2006), founded *Bear Magazine* in 1987. Nope. It was us. Bulger and Nelson were smart enough to make a cottage industry of it.” <https://www.advocate.com/comedy/2014/04/17/tbt-when-advocate-invented-bears#article-content>

determine his own particular fetish (beard, body hair, and/or weight), but most felt that a shared outlook, discovered among kindred spirits, was the most important thing. (Wright 351-352).

Although first coined in 1979, the language and labels of the bear community (as well as the LGBTQ Community) have tremendously evolved and developed, to the point that they could have their own encyclopedia. Continuing with theme of animals, other members of the bear community could be defined as: **otter**¹⁰, **cub**¹¹, **daddy bear**¹², **grizzly**¹³, **panda bear**¹⁴, **black bear**¹⁵ **polar bear**¹⁶, **pig**¹⁷, and **pup**¹⁸.

1.3 Overview of (Sub)culture, Queer Community, and In-/Exclusionary Apps

Queer cultures (such as the Gay Community) and subcultures (like the Bear Community), function and exist to provide a sense of community and belonging, since queer identities are not completely accepted in neither the “binary”¹⁹ heterosexual society nor compulsory heterosexuality²⁰. In Chapter 7 “Queer Feelings” from her book *the politics of emotion*, Sara

¹⁰ A man who is especially hairy, but is smaller in frame and weighs considerably less than a **bear**. Pinknews.com

¹¹ A baby bear. As bears are typically older men, cubs are younger ones. Large, hairy guys in their teens and 20's who are on their way to becoming a bear. Pride.com

¹² The dominant partner of a cub (Hennen)

¹³ More mature and demanding bears (Hennen)

¹⁴ “In the book *Modern Bear* (Smith and Bale, 2012), a chapter was dedicated to the black bear (i.e., Black men) and another to the panda bear (i.e., Asian/Asian-American men), providing some representation of bears of color.” (Surface et al. 891) in “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer: Bear and Leather Subcultures”

¹⁵ “African-American bears or black bears (which I choose to use because it has a nice ring to it and there *are* actually black bears) are alive and well in the bear community. We love big hairy men just as much as the next bear but our club participation may be lacking for many reasons. (Clark) in *One Black Bear Speaks*”. *The Bear Book II: Further Readings in the History and Evolution of a Gay Male Subculture*

¹⁶ Older bear with white or grey hair (Hennen)

¹⁷ As you might imagine, pigs are more focused on sex than anything else, often into kinkier and somewhat seedier sexual practices. pride.com

¹⁸ As part of pup play, a form of kink that is becoming more popular in the gay community. Men act as puppies and have handlers. The handler treats their puppies like they would their own dog, with love and affection. It's a great introduction for gay men interested in kink and has a pretty relaxed power dynamic as far as kink goes. pride.com

¹⁹ The Cambridge Dictionary defines a binary as “relating to or consisting of two things, in which everything is either one thing or the other: the system tends to reinforce binary opposites: us and them, self and other, objective and subjective.” This thesis analyzes and discusses the following binaries: heterosexual and homosexual, Twink [which will be later defined] and Bear, and Gay Community and Bear Community. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/binary>

²⁰ The concept of compulsory heterosexuality was made prominent through the efforts of lesbian and feminist movements in the late 1960s and 1970s but was popularized by American poet Adrienne Rich (1980) in her essay, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” (1980). In this essay, Rich examines the history and

Ahmed describes how compulsory heterosexuality “shapes bodies by the assumption that a body ‘must’ orient itself towards some objects and not others, objects that are secured as ideal through the fantasy of difference... Hence compulsory heterosexuality shapes which bodies one ‘can’ legitimately approach as would-be lovers and which one cannot.” Ahmed further defines compulsory heterosexuality as follows:

To make a simple but important point: orientations affect what it is that bodies can do.² Hence, the failure to orient oneself ‘towards’ the ideal sexual object affects how we live in the world, an affect that is readable as the failure to reproduce, and as a threat to the social ordering of life itself. Of course, one does not have to do what one is compelled to do: for something to be compulsory shows that it is not necessary. But to refuse to be compelled by the narratives of ideal heterosexuality in one’s orientation to others is still to be affected by those narratives; they work to script one’s orientation as a form of disobedience. The affects of ‘not following’ the scripts can be multiple. We can consider, for example, the psychic as well as social costs of loving a body that is supposed to be unloveable for the subject I am, or loving a body that I was ‘supposed to’ repudiate, which may include shame and melancholia (Butler 1997b; Braidotti 2002: 53; see Chapter 5) (Ahmed 145)

Ahmed’s viewpoint is that queer people will always be assumed and placed into “compulsory” heterosexual categories. While we (as queer people) do not have to follow or accept these placements, we will always be inherently labeled as “the other” or shamed by virtue of our queerness.

normalization of heterosexuality and looks to break down the idea that heterosexuality is natural. Instead, Rich defines heterosexuality as a socially constructed institution that is used to reinforce a patriarchal structure that ensures ‘male’ dominance, the subordination of ‘female’ **sexuality**, and the erasure of lesbian identity... Since Rich’s essay was first published, there have been numerous critiques, as well as responses that expand on the original focus, using the conceptualization of compulsory heterosexuality to explore queer existence and impacts on genders across the spectrum. Other scholars, as discussed below, have begun to examine the impacts of compulsory heterosexuality on classroom spaces, gender and sexual identity formation, and the concept of **homonormativity**. (Bittner115).

Despite these queer cultures and subcultures existing as safe haven from compulsory heterosexuality, as well as a providing a silver lining for community and belonging, this is not always the case when exclusions, prejudices, and discrimination happen within the group. For every mainstream or binary group, there is an “other” or opposite group. For example, heterosexual society is the binary group, whereas the Gay Community is other group. Omitting heterosexual society from the following further examples, these binary opposites apply to gay cultures and subcultures as well. A further example of two binaries is Bear and Twink. A Bear (See footnote1) is hairier, bigger, etc., whereas a Twink (See footnote 9 below) is youthful, thin, and clean shaven. For example, the Gay Community is the binary group, whereas the Bear community is the other group. In other terms, binaries function as analytical lenses that allow us to understand things, but do not hold as distinctly as they are made out to be. When applying a hierarchical order to both communities, white Twinks²¹, Hunks²² are at the top of the order, whereas Bears (and those who may or may not fall under the Bear umbrella if they prefer to not use labels) are at the bottom, followed by fat and gay men, disabled gay men (Crips²⁴) and trans gay men falling at the very bottom of the hierarchy. In his article “How Gay Men Are Endorsing Toxic Masculinity without Knowing”, Hugo Mega coalesces Olivia Gazalé’s perception of “binary” with bell hooks’ motion of the matrix of oppression (which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter) to parallel the hierarchy to a pyramid of privilege:

Pairing this vision of the binary proposed by Olivia Gazalé with the matrix of oppression suggested by bell hooks, this is how I hypothetically see this hierarchical pyramid of privilege unfold in our western societal context:

At the top, there is the white, cisgender, heterosexual, wealthy male – privileged over people of other races, colours and genders, no matter their wealth. This male will also be privileged over less masculine or less virile, cisgender, heterosexual, wealthy men. That

²¹ In gay male circles, a young man (teens to early 20s) or one who looks younger than their age, who is typically attractive, lacking in body or facial hair and of a slim build. Contrasted with **bear**. See also: **Grindr Tribes**. Taken from <https://www.thepinknews.com/2017/11/27/the-ultimate-lgbt-glossary-all-your-questions-answered/#page/19>

²² A muscular, handsome gay man. Taken from <https://www.thepinknews.com/2017/11/27/the-ultimate-lgbt-glossary-all-your-questions-answered/#page/9>

²⁴ “crip,” the non-compliant, anti-assimilationist position that disability is a desirable part of the world (Hamraie et al.2).

less virile man “is” still privileged compared to a gay man, who – regardless of their sexuality – remains privileged over women, non binary and trans people. (Mega)

It is important to understand and note the different roles that power and privilege play in specific (subcultures), as well as the hierarchy that they create and follow, (like Mega mentions with the hierarchical pyramid). The matrix of oppression (also known as the matrix of domination) will be analyzed in more detail in the next chapter.

One such place that can help queer ²⁵people (gay men in particular) find and develop a sense of belonging through community, an understanding for personal identity and social bonds through friendship, romance, and sexuality are via gay online dating apps. In their article “Use of 'gay Dating Apps' and Its Relationship with Individual Well-Being and Sense of Community in Men Who Have Sex with Men” Karyofyllis Zervoulis et al., describe the positive potential of gay dating apps in the following:

As well as being able to use online platforms to find partners more easily, another benefit that MSM may gain through GDAs [gay dating apps] is a sense of community. As per other LGBT spaces, GDAs can subvert the oppression of heterosexist norms by permitting individuals to behave genuinely (Myslik, 1996). This freedom can have psychological benefits for members of the community. For example, connecting digitally with other LGBT people can have a positive effect on people’s sexual self-acceptance (Crowson & Goulding, 2013; DeHaan et al., 2013). Members of online communities often feel better able to connect with others they can relate to than they do offline. Through their experiences, they can also learn ‘how to be gay’ together (Castañeda, 2015, p. 1). Hence, GDAs can be socially empowering because they facilitate identity processes and interpersonal relations (Castañeda, 2015; Crowson & Goulding, 2013; Dodge, 2014; Jaspal, 2017).
(Zervoulis et al. 90)

²⁵ I would also like to point out that I use gay, queer, bear, often parallel to one another. Not all queer people are bears and gays, some gay people are decidedly not queer.

I would like to clarify that by online dating apps refers most specifically to those apps found on mobile phones. Apps that are specifically used on the computer will be referred to as web-based apps. While Grindr prides itself as “the largest social networking app for gay, bi, trans, and queer people²⁶” (men are looking to have sex with other men or MSM²⁷), it predominantly focuses on young, white, muscular, able-bodied, cis-gendered ²⁸men. Although there are specific filters or “Grinder Tribes²⁹” one can select to make the experience more diverse and inclusive (i.e., display only Bears, or Daddies³⁰, or Men of Color), discrimination and exclusion are unfortunately still very much commonplace on Grindr. The discrimination and exclusion have become so common-place to the point that various taglines and catch-phrases are blatantly (and publicly) displayed on user profiles. As previously mentioned, the infamous “No fats, no Femmes, no Asians” tagline continues to be an example of such exclusions. The previous statement, which demonstrates prejudices and exclusions that intersect at ableism, gender, and race, is so often discussed and seen on the dating apps, so frequently, that it has become a meme within gay culture. While some embrace it, others resort to humor in order to highlight how ridiculous and out of touch with reality it is. Despite the absurdity, exclusion, and hate that the phrase provides, it is both difficult to deconstruct and an irrefutable, entangled mess where gender identity, race, and body identity intersect. In his article “No Fats, No Femmes, No Asians”, Xiaofei Liu aims to deconstruct and decipher the phrase from a gay, American perspective.

In a recent article on a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community website, LGBT activist Jimmy Nguyen complained about a frequent caveat in online dating profiles – “No Fats, Femmes, or Asians.” (2011) Mr. Nguyen was frustrated at the bias against Asians in the American gay community. Although avoiding the accusation of racism, he channeled his frustration by calling it racial looksism.¹ The article sparked

²⁶ Grindr.com/about

²⁷ Men who have sex with men, who do not necessarily identify as gay, homosexual or bisexual. Pinknews.com

²⁸ A person whose gender identity corresponds with their assigned sex. Contrasting with trans (aka cis) pinknews.com

²⁹ 12 different categories **Grindr** users can self-identify as, and also filter searches by. See: **Bear, Clean-Cut, Daddy, Discreet, Geek, Jock, Leather, Otter, Poz, Rugged, Trans** and **Twink pinknews.com**

³⁰ An older man in a romantic or sexual relationship with another man. Often indicates the power structure in the relationship, where the older partner has a larger income or social power. Pinknews.com

interesting response. One commentator asked, “Mr. Nguyen, would you date a fat man?” The point is elegantly made: if simple lookism is acceptable, what’s wrong with racial lookism? This exchange highlights something perplexing about our attitudes toward discrimination. We object to certain forms of discrimination, yet at the same time take for granted some other forms. What might ground our discriminative treatment of discrimination? Is there any relevant difference between racial lookism and simple looksism? (Liu 255-256)

Although queer subcultures aim to provide inclusion and celebrate diversity, it is important to note that exclusions and discrimination can occur both from inside and outside of the subculture.

1.4 Research Question:

While focusing only on the fat aspect from the exclusionary tagline “No Fats, No Femmes, No Asians” as well as considering binary society and culture, queer (sub)culture (further focused via the lens of the Bear Community), it is important to examine how inclusions and exclusions occur within the community via gay dating apps. One can view the “Fats” from “No Fats, No Femmes, No Asians” as the Bear Community; the Bear Community is excluded from mainstream Gay Culture of Twinks, as well as the corresponding dating app Grindr. As a result, the Bear Community exists as a utopia for fat, hairy, and scruffy gay men. Although the Bear Community and its signature app Growlr exist in response to being excluded from mainstream gay culture, one must not forget that exclusions (as well as inclusions) occur within the community. In order to understand and examine the Bear Community’s experiences of (in)exclusions via gay dating apps, as well as the potential forming of personal and subcultural identity, I utilize and apply the following research question while conducting research and interviews: How do gay dating apps facilitate inclusions and exclusions, within the bear community? Furthermore, what role do the apps play in shaping identity and subculture in the bear community?

1.5 Expected Scientific Contribution/ Hypothesis:

The goal of the research is to analyze the bear community as a subculture through the lens of gay dating apps. Exclusionary and inclusionary experiences on the apps are analyzed as well as if/how the apps allow community and identity. I also analyze what role (if any) the apps played at

the time of coming out (online and offline experiences as well). I hypothesize that apps make it easier to exclude and discriminate (due to some online anonymity) and that community is easier to find offline. However, it is in many cases easier to meet new friends and acquaintances online instead of offline. I hope this research contributes new, helpful, and insightful results to a subject and area of scholarship that is somewhat but not totally underrepresented. While “taboo” areas of scholarship such as BDSM and fetish studies are slowly receiving more recognition, it is my hope that this will also become the case with the contemporary bear community (I say this as there are a few foundational texts and ethnographies) as well as with the intersection of Fat Studies and Queer Studies.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

Following the introduction (and in chronological order) is Chapter 2 which provides an overview of the theory applied in the thesis (Jack Halberstam, José Esteban Muñoz, and Patricia Hills Collin), relevant approaches that did not play a role. Introduction of theory used. Related work. Embedding of the research question in the current state of research. Chapter 3 discusses the selected research methods (Semi-Structured Guided Interviews and Qualitative Content Analysis according to Mayring). Additionally, the compilation and preparation of the research materials as well as analysis and quality criteria are also discussed. Chapter 4 examines the results of the analysis (qualitative content analysis via coding and categorization of the interview transcripts), while providing a summary of the main narrative (as a result of the interviews). The three main themes Body Identity, Culture, and Community will also be thoroughly discussed in this chapter. Chapter 5 provides the discussion of the results and their connection with current state of research, as well as an interpretation of the results. Chapter 6 gives an overview of the final concluding insights (conclusion, summary of the work, answering of the research questions, outlook, and limitations). Following Chapter 6 is the bibliography and index.

Chapter 2. Overview of Applied Theory

The following chapter provides an overview of the bear community, the applied theory and its corresponding theorists, relevant theoretical approaches that did not play a role in the research, relevant literature, as well as the current state of literature. Jack Halberstam’s theory of Queer Temporalities and Subcultures, as well as José Esteban Muñoz’s theory of Queer Futurity, will

be utilized to understand the bear community as a subculture as well as how it develops identity, community, and existence, both spatially and over time via the apps. In addition to Muñoz and Halberstam, Patricia Hill's theory of The Matrix of domination (also known as the Matrix of Oppression) will be discussed to draw parallels to different levels of discrimination found within the Bear and greater LGBTIQ Community. Lastly, related works and the embedding research question in the current state of research are discussed.

2.1 Jack Halberstam and Queer Temporalities and Subcultures

In their text "What's That Smell: Queer Temporalities and Subcultural lives" Jack Halberstam aims to examine how queer subcultures contrast to the dominant heterosexual culture, while focusing on the concepts of temporalities. According to Halberstam, "Queer uses of time and space develop in opposition to the institution of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction, and queer subcultures develop as alternatives to kinship-based notions of community" (Halberstam3). While the bear community opposes the previously mentioned institutions of the binary heterosexual culture, it also opposes the (both heterosexual and "gay") institution of body politics, gender expression, ageism, which are prevalent in the binary gay culture. While body image is (in its own unique way) important to all cultures and subcultures, it is rather more pronounced in binary gay culture. It is critical to maintain a muscular in shape physique as a gay man. Even the smallest physical sign of body fat is considered to be negative and bad. In addition to rock-hard abs, a hairless face and chest are a must. In his article "Big Handsome Men, Bears and Others: Virtual Constructions of 'Fat Male Embodiment'", Lee F. Monaghan states that "Gay culture, more so than heterosexual culture, objectifies a standard image of male beauty: 'the young, blond, smooth-skinned, gym-buffed' model type or 'twink'(Wright,1997:2)" (Monaghan91).

As previously mentioned, because the bear community does not adhere to the mainstream gay standard of thin, hairless, and youthful bodies, it undoubtedly exists as a subculture. Although subcultures can be analyzed from a purely observational perspective, it is important to draw parallels and anchors to other theoretical perspectives. In his text, Halberstam also mentions three central ideas that, in his perspective are critical to subcultural theory. These ideas

demonstrate how subcultures fit into research from a theoretical and critical perspective.

Halberstam states:

- 1.) First, considering the relationship between the subcultural producers and the queer cultural theorist (Halberstam11)
- 2.) Second, focusing on subcultures that are underrepresented such as lesbian subcultures and/or subcultures of color. (Halberstam12)
- 3.) Third, “the nature of queer subcultural activity requires a nuanced theory of archives and archiving.” (Halberstam17).

Halberstam’s first point reiterates that one must consider the relationship between subcultural producers and subcultural theorists. Halberstam further discusses “blurred boundaries” between producer and theorist, meaning that the theorist often positions themselves as being a current or former member of the subculture. “Minority subculture in general tend to be documented by former or current members of the subcultures rather than by ‘adult’ experts. Nonetheless, queer subcultures in particular are often marked by this lack of distinction between the archivist and the cultural worker” (Halberstam11).

Although the bear community may at times be more represented than, for example, lesbian subcultures and subcultures of color, it is still nonetheless an underrepresented subculture when compared to the dominant main gay culture. It is also important to note that race can indisputably intersect with bear culture (i.e., the notion of fat and black). In the chapter “One Black Bear Speaks” by Jason R. Clark from Les K. Wright’s *The Bear Book II* discusses the struggles he faces as a Black Bear:

Speaking from my experience as a black bear, just being a black gay male has obstacles. Homosexuality in the black community is still not generally understood- exceptions being that distant aunt, uncle, cousin, or that one particular kid down the street that jumped double dutch really well. Being gay is unacceptable. So once you have overcome this first hurdle you now must become comfortable with the fact that you like your men big, hairy, and possibly (maybe even for a large majority) white. It has been my observation (not generalization) that many of the gay black males I have met are either

extremely effeminate or are rarely able to reveal their sexuality, hiding behind a pseudo bisexual façade (Clark 125).

Clark presents us with the various “levels” that black bears must pass for acceptance: coming out as a gay man, coming out as someone who likes fat men, and additionally coming out as someone who potentially likes white men and/or effeminate men. Furthermore, a Black Bear’s identity and struggles intersect with race, (homo)sexuality, and gender.

The second point relevant to the bear community is as an underrepresented subculture³¹. “Second, queer subcultural theory should begin with those communities that never seem to surface in the commentaries on subcultures in general- namely lesbian subcultures and subcultures of color. Cultural theory has created a hierarchy of subcultures that places English punk toward the top, and then arranges mods, rockers, metalheads, club kids, DJ culture, ravers, and rappers in some sort of descending order of importance” (Halberstam13). A possible arrangement of the bear community as a gay subculture could be ordered as followed (roughly) twinkles, jocks, hunks, bi, leather, BDSM, bears. This hierarchy can further be applied and reduced into the bear community (roughly) as follows: muscle bears, cubs, daddies, chasers, chubs, black bears, panda bears, polar bears.

Halberstam’s third and final point for subcultural theory is that subcultural activity “requires a nuanced theory of archives and archiving.” Halberstam discusses the significance of queer archiving as follows:

Work on archives and archiving is well under way and can be found in the work of an eclectic group of queer cultural theorists including Lauren Berlant, Ann Cvetkovich, and Jose Munoz. Ideally, an archive of queer subcultures would merge ethnographic

³¹ “Men who identify as Bears are often characterized as being positioned outside of the mainstream gay community, and as opposing to the stereotypes of gay men as effeminate [10]. They are distinguished by a particular body look—a heavier, muscular or less sculpted physique, which is usually accompanied by more pronounced secondary sex characteristics, such as body hair. As a group, Bears celebrate and eroticize larger bodies, and exhibit resistance to anti-obesity culture, perpetuated by mainstream gay values [11].” Mijas et al. in Chubby, Hairy and Fearless. Subcultural Identities and Predictors of Self-Esteem in a Sample of Polish Members of Bear Community

interviews with performers and fans with research in the multiple archives that already exist online and in other unofficial sites. Queer zines, posters, guerilla art, and other temporary artifacts would make up some of the paper archives, and descriptions of shows, along with the self-understandings of cultural producers, would provide supplementary materials. But the notion of an archive has to extend beyond the image of a place to collect material or hold documents, and it has to become a floating signifier for the kinds of lives implied by the paper remnants of shows, clubs, events, and meetings (Halberstam 17).

This is important, since the central research method selected for this thesis is semi-structured interviews. These ethnographic interviews focus not only the bear community, but also on several additional subcultures that intersect with the bear community. The interviews mentioned archive both online and offline, official and unofficial, as well as how language specific to the bear community as a subculture can be seen as an archived cultural producer. Halberstam previously mentions José Muñoz as a queer cultural theorist who also focuses on archives/archiving. He is the second theorist, whose work is applied to this thesis.

“Queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities, I will argue, by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of the conventional forward-moving narratives of birth, marriage, reproduction, and death” (Halberstam 3-4). These “alternative temporalities”, which Halberstam previously described can also coincide with conventional body image (both in the heterosexual and the homosexual world). The ideals for the conventional male body (slim, clean-shaven, hairless, muscular) are shared by the heterosexual world and the homosexual world. The bear community lies outside of this conventional body image, while beards, hair, fat, bigger body mass do not belong to the conventional gay man’s body image. It is important to note that chasers would technically fall out of this norm, due to the fact that their bodies negate the conventional bear body. Bears may exclude chasers (because chasers are thin and don’t have a stereotypical bearish body), those bears who are attracted to chasers by other bears (for liking thin men in a non-bear context). Recalling *Fat Gay Men: Girth, Mirth, and the Politics of Stigma* Jason Whitesel discusses the chaser and chub dynamic:

In both heterosexual and gay society, there are chub/chaser subcultures. In the heterosexual main, men of a larger stature are still desirable to some women, without being relegated to the margins of society because of their fat bodies. But in the gay main, it would be rare for a big man to be desirable to other gay men, his bulk forcing him to seek sexual validation on the fringes. It is in response to big gay men's abject corporeal status that Girth & Mirth organizes events such as those at Convergence and the Super Weekend. (Whitesel 102)

Despite this complex marginalization, the Bear Community exists as a safe haven for those who do not have a mainstream body shape and functions as a utopia for acceptance, celebration, and body positive. This notion of Utopia will be analyzed in the next chapter, concurrent with Muñoz theory of Queer Futurity.

2.2 José Esteban Muñoz and Queer Futurity

The second theorist that will be used to examine and ground bear subcultures is José Esteban Muñoz. Muñoz developed a theory of Queer Futurity which allows queerness to exist (or not yet exist) in a specific spatial area of time. In his book *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There ***of Queer Futurity* (2009), Esteban describes queer futurity as follows:

Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness's domain. Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present. The here and now is a prison house. We must strive, in the face of the here and now's totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a *then and there* (Muñoz1).

Queer Futurity pertains to not only queer culture, but especially the bears community due to the fact that fatness (and bearishness) is not accepted by society and therefore only exists in the future. Fatness, due to its sense of "othering" can be read as inherently queer and empowering.

Furthermore, fatness is rejected by both mainstream gay and mainstream heterosexual society. This is the same case with queerness (a category which bears also fall under). It only exists in the future due to its denouncement by heterosexual society.

A further example which anchors the bear community to the concept of Queer Futurity is the fact that bear culture exists and functions as utopia for those who do not belong. Muñoz argues that his concept of Queer Futurity coincides with Ernst Bloch's "principle of hope". Muñoz states that:

But on some level utopia is about a politics of emotion; it is central to what Ernst Bloch called "principle of hope."² It is my belief that minoritarian subjects are cast as hopeless in a world without utopia. This is not to say that hope is the only modality of emotional recognition that structures belonging; sometimes shame, disgust, hate, and other "negative" emotions bind people together—certainly punk rock's rejection of normative feelings stands as the most significant example of the emotional work of negative affect. But in this instance, I dwell on hope because I wish to think about futurity; and hope, I argue, is the emotional modality that permits us to access futurity, par excellence. (Muñoz 97-99).

As Muñoz previously stated, queer minorities are hopeless in a heterosexual world without a queer utopia. Bears are hopeless in an ableist and ageist society, that is preoccupied with body image. Bear culture is a utopia for those who do not belong in the mainstream. According to Muñoz, a queer approach to this is hope is to be seen and celebrated by the queer community as a whole, not ridiculed.

It is also important to note that the hope, utopia, and queer futurity pertains to and reaches not just the bear community but the entirety of the queer community. Muñoz argues that we must risk the potential of disappointment in order to achieve hope and utopia. Muñoz states, "This fear of both hope and utopia, as affective structures, and approaches to challenges within the social, has been prone to disappointment, making this critical approach difficult. As Bloch would insist, hope can be disappointed. But such disappointment needs to be risked if certain impasses are to be resisted" (Muñoz 9). Perhaps one could argue to be queer means to be disappointed (or face

disappointment). Queer people risk the disappointment of losing friends and family when coming out, risk losing acceptance and respect when they are confident and comfortable with their body, which is either fat or deviating from a body deemed to be to norm by society, and furthermore risk losing their own community [wokeness, cancel culture, discrimination]. Despite this risk for disappointment, the entirety of queer cultures and subcultures must strive to embrace and find hope. Muñoz further states:

In the place of various exhausted theoretical stances *Cruising Utopia* not only asks readers to reconsider ideas such as hope and utopia but also challenges them to feel hope and to feel utopia, which is to say challenges them to approach the queer critique from a renewed and newly animated sense of the social, carefully cruising for the varied potentialities that may abound within that field (Muñoz18).

In a world of policed bodies, repressed sexualities, and queer persecution, it is critical to “challenge” hope and utopia, as stated by Muñoz because it rather effortless to lose sight of dreams and utopia. To challenge what we hope is to confront what we are denied and condemn compulsory heterosexuality. Additionally, one can parallel Muñoz’s reference of the so-called “renewed and newly animated sense of the social” to gay dating apps because the apps because they attempt to promise the idea of a lover, friend, sexual escapade, and a sense of community. While this sense of social is customary of our time, it looks back to the past and allows us to meet in person (offline) while simultaneously making such arrangements in the future (online).

Having analyzed and discussed the role and significance of Queer Futurism and hope in both queer culture and bear subculture from a spatial perception and through the lens of the politics of emotion, it is also important to consider queer utopianism form a historical perspective. Muñoz describes the historical occurrence of queer utopia and Queer Futurism as follows:

Cruising Utopia’s first move is to describe a modality of queer utopianism that I locate within a historically specific nexus of cultural production before, around, and slightly after the Stonewall rebellion of 1969. A Blochian approach to aesthetic theory is invested in describing the anticipatory illumination of art, which can be characterized as the

process of identifying certain properties that can be detected in representational practices helping us to see the not-yet-conscious (Muñoz 3).

Stonewall was revolutionary not only because it was the steppingstone for gay liberation and queer rights, but also because it represented the what Muñoz describes as the not-yet conscious. Gay dating apps can similarly be seen in the same light, since they succeeded cruising culture³². Long before the apps and Stonewall riots, it was not possible for gay men to be seen in public, and therefore rather difficult to embrace their sexual desires without facing punishment or persecution. As a result, the practice of cruising for sex in areas such as public toilets and parks was established for gay men to anonymously and semi-safely engage in sexual activity. Sequentially, the events of Stonewall, the establishment of gay cruising culture, and the creation of gay dating apps all help us to see the not-yet conscious.

The overlapping theme of discrimination is seen in both Halberstam's theories of Queer Temporalities and Queer Subcultures, as well as in Muñoz's theories of queer hope, queer utopia, and Queer Futurism. In order to deeper understand how discriminations and prejudices can occur simultaneously in different queer subcultures, a brief look at Patricia Hill Collins' theory of the Matrix of Domination

2.3 Hill Collins and the Matrix of Domination

Patricia Hill Collins first coined the matrix of domination theory in her book "Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment". According to Hill Collins the matrix of domination is:

the overall organization of hierarchical power relations for any society. Any specific matrix of domination has (1) a particular arrangement of intersecting systems of

³² In reference to his interviewees, Richard Miskolci states: "The older men comment with nostalgia about the decline of the culture of the bars and cruising, that is, a culture more open to sexual experimentation. According to the reports that I collected among older gay men, the old cruising was characterized by uncertainty and chance" (Miskolci) in "Strangers in Paradise: Notes on the Use of Dating Apps for Hookups in San Francisco"

oppression, e.g., race, social class, gender, sexuality, citizenship status, ethnicity and age; and (2) a particular organization of its domains of power, e.g., structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal. (Hill Collins 299)

These intersecting systems of oppression apply to not only Gay culture and Bear Subculture, but also to the entirety of the LGBTQ+ community. My initial approach was to apply Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality³³ to the Bear Community to coincide with and represent the various and plural discriminations that members of the Bear Community face. However, I chose not to use this theory as it does not pertain to fat people and because it is most designed for women of color. I also initially intended to analyze each targeted (sub)culture in the "No Fats, No Fems, No Asians" tagline, however, chose to focus only on The Bear Community, due to my positionality as a Bear. Nonetheless, intersectionality is worthy of mentioning, as it can be viewed as parallel to the matrix of dominations since it intersects various oppressions. Hill Collins discusses how domination and intersecting oppressions relate to one another:

For example, viewing domination itself as encompassing intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation points to the significance of these oppressions in shaping the overall organization of a particular matrix of domination. Similarly, personal identities constructed around individual understandings of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation define each individual's unique biography. (Hill Collins 275)

Bears face marginalization due to their body type and physical appearance. Such marginalization includes the intersections of fat and gay; fat gay, and colored; fat, gay, colored, and trans, etc. It is also important to note that bears face discrimination from both heterosexual society and their own gay community. Furthermore, discrimination and prejudices occur in all queer communities and subcultures. Some of these queer cultures and subcultures are more vulnerable than others

³³ Crenshaw defines intersectionality as an analogy of traffic at an intersection flowing in all four directions. "Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination." Crenshaw in "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics".

and face multiple discriminations as summarized by intersectionality, while others face less discrimination. In order to avoid discrimination, some queer people intentionally dress in order “to pass” as heterosexual, while others’ pass by virtue of how they dress (unintentionally). Many bears are seen as “passing”, because they tend to wear simpler clothes and dress less flamboyant. Regardless of how one chooses to dress, regardless of intention, no person should face Collins offer insightful logic and propositions for the creation, utilization, and function of queer subcultures like the bear community. The next section will focus on the current state of research and how the research questions relate to it.

2.4 Current State of Research and Related Work

The current state of research includes a variety of academic articles, journals, ethnographies, and texts focusing largely on the bear community, gay dating/hookup apps, as well as gay culture and subculture. The areas of gender, race, (homo)sexuality, matrix of domination, and intersectionality were also included in the current state of research. When considering the source of inspiration for this thesis, it is important to note that there is reasonable amount of current literature that analyze the phrase “No fats, no femmes, no Asians”, despite the fact that it is a contemporary catchphrase. Focusing on current articles and journals, for example, Xiaofei Liu’s article “No Fats, Femmes, or Asians” attempts to only scratch the surface of the phrase and the mindset, that surrounds it. At the beginning of the article, Liu quotes Jimmy Nguyen, an Asian-American LGBT activist, for using the term “racial lookism”. Nguyen essentially dismisses the racist aspect of the phrase and states that gay men aren’t racist, they’re “lookist”. A commentator further challenges Nguyen by asking if he would date a fat man. Liu points out “The point is elegantly made: if simple lookism is acceptable, what’s wrong with racial lookism?” Nguyen’s outlook is important to analyze because he demonstrates how different attitudes shape the complexity of discrimination. Some forms of discrimination have a central focus and/or aspect of activism, while other forms of discrimination go overlooked and are hardly discussed. The issue is intersectional. None of the three stigmatized subcultures can be ignored, rather, they must all receive equal attention, respect, and understanding.

Another example of an insightful journal, which highlights the importance of the Bear Community for fat gay men is from the Journal of Homosexuality. In his article ““Grow the

Beard, Wear the Costume’: Resisting Weight and Sexual Orientation Stigmas in the Bear Subculture”, Patrick B. McGrady highlights the struggle and stigmas that some Bears and gay men face for being fat and gay. Through narrative and qualitative methods, McGrady examines the intersection of fat and gay as represented and celebrated by the Bear Community as well as discusses how the Bear Community rejects these stigmas by celebrating fat, bearish bodies.

McGrady states:

Overweight gay men encounter not only stereotypes of being gay but also the effects of weight stigma. The bear community offers a place for some men to feel some acceptance of their bigger bodies and to feel more comfortable as masculine gay men. For example, many bear events celebrate larger bodies by including bear pageants in which participants compete for titles such as “Bear Bust Cub,” as well as providing places for men to flaunt their bigger and hirsute bodies (Suresha, 2002). Thus, bears are an alternative subculture aimed at resisting weight and sexual orientation stereotypes through creating alternative body ideals (Schwalbe et al., 2000). (McGrady 1704-1705)

This is important to note because bears resist both the stigmas of weight and sexual orientation through sub-culture. The “alternative body ideals” provide a utopia, safe space, and sense of belonging, all aspects that are difficult to achieve in both the gay cultural binary and the heterosexual binary. McGrady also mentions in the article that not a lot of research has been conducted regarding the intersection of fat and gay.

Other Articles that I examined during research include (but are not limited to) Michael D. Bartone’s article “Jack’d, a Mobile Social Networking Application: A Site of Exclusion Within a Site of Inclusion”, as well as Laurence Brown’s “Fat Is a Bearish Issue” from *The Bear Book II*, (edited by Les Wright).

In addition to online journals and academic articles, several books offered insightful and beneficial scholarship of the Bear World. The most notable and fruitful include Peter Hennen’s ethnography *Faeries, Bears, and Leathermen* as well as Jason Whitesel’s ethnography *Fat Gay Men: Girth, Mirth and the Politics*. While Hennen discusses the three distinct subcultures of

Faeries, Bears, and Leatherman in his ethnography. He interviews members of each subculture while focusing his research on queering gender and masculinity (and less on race). However, Hennen provides not only valuable insight to bear culture, and what a bear, he juxtaposes each of the three subcultures against one another via his ethnographic research. Hennen and his interviews describe Bears and the Bear Community as follows:

As is the case in Faerie culture, the very undecidability of identity is a prominent subcultural feature of the Bear community. Just what is a Bear? Responses to this question reveal a variety of answers, but almost all reference the Bear body, either in an attempt to describe what the typical Bear looks like or to refute the idea that Bears can be defined *exclusively* by their bodies. As Travis, one of my interview subjects, put it, “You know, physical attributes such as stockiness, height, weight, how much facial fur you have, things along those lines. But other people see it as being 90 per- cent attitude, 10 percent looks.” What constitutes Bear attitude? Responses I encountered ranged from “natural, down to earth, easy going, likes to have fun” (Larry) to “closer to the heterosexual community in their tastes” (Brian) to “a sense of independence” (Burt) to “an easiness with the body” and “the masculinity thing” (Grant). (Hennen 96-97)

While the previous responses in terms of what a Bear is vary in diversity, a common agreement is reached when the topic of masculinity in the Bear Community is juxtaposed amongst the Faerie and Leather community:

The masculinity thing” within Bear culture is complex and inextricably tied to the workings of hegemonic masculinity outside of it. Whereas the Faerie strategy in responding to the “effeminacy effect” involves parody, Bears respond to masculinity by forcefully repudiating effeminacy with a renewed claim to “authentic” masculinity... Bears reject the self-conscious, exaggerated masculinity of the gay leatherman in favor of a more authentic masculinity. This look includes (but is not limited to) jeans, baseball caps, T-shirts, flannel shirts, and beards (Hennen97).

These over-arching narratives of masculinity are important, not only because they demonstrate how each subculture operates on its own, as well as amongst one another, but also because they shape the narrative of the Bear Community. While Bears “reject” the femininity that Faeries embrace in satire, they also admit that they reject the “extreme” masculinity of leatherman. Bears lie somewhere in the middle of these two “poles” of masculinity

Hennen used the term “Girth and Mirth” when providing an overview of the Bear Community’s History. The next relevant author in the current state of research is Jason Whitesel, who based his entire ethnography “Fat Gay Men: Girth, Mirth and Politics of Stigma” around the concept of “Girth and Mirth”.

Big gay men incur social wounds produced by the stigmas of their size and sexuality combined. As looks are one of the organizing features of the gay world, gay big men have an added exclusion that has not been fully explored. There is the exclusion all gay people experience- a group of people who want equality. Then there is the within-group prejudice big men experience because of their ample size. Gay big men are thus marginalized both for their sexual orientation in a heteronormative society, and for their in gay society, thereby constituting subaltern. Given their doubly marginalized position, they strive for dignity and respect (Whitesel 2).

This further reiterates the intersection of fatness and gayness, which is critical to understanding a double-marginalized identity as well as how it functions and exists as the other within two separate binaries. While the Girth and Mirth Community was the predecessor to the bear community and shares similar subcultural beliefs and customs, it is not the same as the bear community, insofar that its main celebration and focus lies on fat gay men, and not hair, beards.

2.5 The Embedding of the Research Question in the Current Literature.

The research question (How do gay dating apps facilitate inclusions and exclusions, within the gay community? Furthermore, what role do the apps play in shaping gay community and subculture [identity]?) is embedded in the current state of research, due to the fact that it highlights various subcultures and subcultural customs, ranging from Bears, Faeries, the Leather

Community, as well as the Girth and Mirth Community. Much of the research brings to light the double stigma that Bears (and Girth and Mirthers) face for being both fat and gay, as well as the fact that such areas of research and study are underrepresented in academia. Much of the literature so far focused on gay dating apps and their use and function in the Gay Community. Additional supplementary literature which added value and insight to the conversation of fat culture includes Aubrey Gordon's book "What We Don't Talk About When We Talk About Fat".

Gordon's book was instrumental during my writing and research. She reminded me that fat (although can be queered) is not only a queer issue but intersects with queer and gay culture. Her humane and powerful reclaiming of the term "fat" reminded me of the Bear Community's inclusion and celebration of different body types. Although I aim to analyze the intersection of fat and gay, it is important to remember that fatness is not only a queer or gendered issue, but also a human issue. In addition to Gordon, Esther D. Rothblum et al.'s article "Double Stigma: Fat Men and Their Admirers" from *The Fat Studies Reader* specifically highlighted and analyzed the intersection of fat and gay. The methodological literature focuses largely on Philipp Mayring's Qualitative Content Analysis and is further discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3. Methodological Approach

This chapter gives an overview on the selection of the methods and how they have been implemented. The first section focuses on the survey procedure while the second section focuses on the evaluation of the material as well as the structure of the analysis.

3.1 Introduction to Applied Methods

In an effort to grasp a full understanding, become familiar with (sub)cultural customs, and understand function and place in society, one must consider (as Halberstam, mentioned in the theory chapter) the concept of archiving. To achieve a current level of ethnographic understanding as well as to highlight on personal experiences within the subcultural bear community, I chose guided, semi-structured interviews as the central research method for this thesis. Utilizing semi-structured interviews provides the interviewees with some framework, but **also allows them to answer freely and openly, while allowing for specific hypotheses to be tested and discovered . In addition to the interviews, careful analysis and studying of the literature allowed me to gain deeper insights to the material. Such central theses provide the**

basis for the questions posed. Furthermore, such interviews intend to discuss and analyze the role of the apps in the Bear Community, bearing in mind community, online and offline experiences, positive and negative experiences, body politics, and identity. Mayring was chosen as a methodologist due to his epistemological fit to the material.

I invited a number of people from my immediate environment (In Vienna and the surrounding area, focusing on Europe) to participate in an interview. Ultimately seven people agreed to be interviewed. Since the recruiting process took a bit longer and was more challenging than anticipated, two candidates from the U.S. were recruited and interviewed via Zoom. In addition to the standard recruiting process, snowball-sampling was applied during the interview process. In the text “Contemporary Feminist Research from Theory to Practice” authors Patricia Leavy and Anne Harris describe snowball-sampling as a process in which the interviewer asks the interviewees to refer further persons to take part in the interviews. “For example, if a participant is a particularly good source of information and/or seems to be well-connected with the larger group you are interested in, you may ask them to suggest additional participants” (Leavy and Harris 14). However, only one interviewee was recruited via snowball-sampling. The interviews occurred in person, with the exception of the two interviewees from the U.S. These interviews took place via Zoom due to distance and difference in time zones. The five interviewees, who met in person were either Austrian or E.U. citizens. The interview was designed to last between forty-five and sixty minutes. The interview guide can be found in the appendix.

3.2 Overview of Applied Methods

I chose Qualitative Content Analysis with a focus on Explicating (Context Analysis) according to Mayring (2015) as my selected method for evaluating the materials and the interviews.

Mayring describes Explicating as follows:

Whereas the goal of summarizing content analysis and inductive category formation was the reduction of the material, the tendency of explication is exactly the reverse. Individual parts of text in need of interpretation are enriched by additional material aimed at explaining them, making them comprehensible, and subjecting them to comment and illustration. The basic idea behind explication as a qualitative content-analytical method is that it precisely defines which additional material is permissible to explain a certain

point in the text. This is important because the quality of the interpretation depends on the material chosen. Every interpretation must have as its basis a lexical-grammatical definition; the meaning of language, within its cultural context and in its respective current forms, is continually portrayed in dictionaries and other works of reference; sentence structures are determined by grammar. Knowledge of this general lexical-grammatical character of the particular point of the text concerned is the precondition for its interpretation. (Mayring 85).

I applied the tools for summary and inductive category formation and then merged them with the categories, created from the theory in a further step. Lastly, I created a system of categories according to the interviews to summarize and interpret the material, based on the research question.

The following chart depicts the flow of the analysis:

Determination of the Material

“No Fats, No Fems, No Asians”, found on gay dating apps, I chose to analyze the community in which I am a member: Fats → Bear community.



Analysis of the Situation in Which the Material was Created

Semi- structured interview



Formal Characteristics of the Material

Test-based



Direction of the Analysis

Analytical lenses of futurity and desire



Determination of the Technique of Analysis, Procedure, and Category System

I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews because narrative is essential to studying any (sub)culture. Semi-Structured interviews allow the participants to have guidance and the potential for open-ended responses. After I recorded and transcribed the interviews, I created a category system based on the research question and participant responses.



Definition of the Content Analytical Units (Coding Unit, Context Unit, Recording Unit)

Question for Analysis:

RQ1: How do gay dating apps facilitate inclusions and exclusions, within the bear community? Furthermore, what role do the apps play in shaping identity and subculture in the bear community?

Content analytical technique:

Deductive Category Assignment

Content analytical units:

Coding unit: Single word

Context unit: Complete answers to individual questions should be the largest text module that can fall under a category

Recording unit: 1 Document (compiled of all 7 interviews). Count multiple codings per document.



Presentation of the Results

The transcriptions resulted in ten categories and 27 subcategories. These (sub)categories were further reduced to the following three categories: Body Identity, Culture, and Community.

Body shapes identity → culture is based off the identity → body and culture lie the foundation for

3.3 Survey Procedure

The method I chose for this thesis is qualitative research methods in the form of semi-structured, guided interviews, largely since the qualitative interview method aims to approach the research field as unbiased as possible. The survey provided in the guided interview allows both me (as the interviewer) and the interviewee to have some structure guidance, while simultaneously allowing for open space, spontaneity, and genuine self-generated questions and responses (enough to generate new insights but works rather on the surface of the research problem). Pre-assumptions are elaborated from already existing theories and developed into categories, which form the basis of the guideline. The goal of the guideline is to ask questions that are open enough to allow subjective answers from the interviewees (Vogt & Werner 2014, 10-11).

3.3.1 Creating the Guideline

Deductive categories reflect the theoretical pre-assumptions about the object of research and show what will be asked in the interview. In forming these categories, the research question is broken down into its constituent parts and, which the categories are formed from. (Vogt & Werner 2014, 23). The categories form the basis for the guideline, which can be found in the appendix.

The guideline is based on the following research question: How do gay dating apps facilitate inclusions and exclusions, within the bear community? Furthermore, what role do the apps play in shaping identity and subculture in the bear community? In developing the categories for the questions, the author worked with the current state of research and with further literature. The following categories are the initial point for the formation of the questions and at the same time create a basic framework for the interview:

- The role the apps in gay daily life (frequency used, intentions, experiences, and interaction)
- Body Politics (Perception of different body types i.e., fat, slim, chubby, hairy, muscular, etc.) and importance of physical appearance (fetishization; discrimination)
- Bear Community (subculture, in/exclusions, labels, language, identity)

- Community, identity, and connections both online and offline (Is sense of community found with or without the apps? If without, how? Did apps help shape and mold identity? If not, what did?)

3.3.2 Interviews

When making the survey, I created questions for each category, while ensuring that the questions would prompt narrative, in order to highlight the different aspects of the categories. The aim of the interview is to follow the rough framework and ensure that all categories are covered by the guided interview. However, this does not mean that every question must be asked strictly according to the survey, rather, that it is also possible to respond to what the interviewees say. In addition, follow-up questions should be asked. In this sense, the interview is semi-structured.

I conducted a practice interview before the formal interviews commenced, which allowed for revision and reflection on the questions. The practice interview also helped to estimate the duration of the interview, to practice the question in order, as well as to test the recording device and its efficiency. The practice interview took about one hour and was held in person at a café (where it was also recorded). The café was noisier than I anticipated and (which I considered when seeking places for formal interviews). Additionally, the practice interview also provided the opportunity to practice asking the questions and reacting to responses.

As previously mentioned, seven participants were selected for interviews, to fit the framework in which the research will take place. Prior to conducting the interviews, I asked each candidate to sign a waiver (per the University of Vienna) which explained their rights (i.e., they could withdraw as a participant at any time if they wished to do so) as well as how their data would be used and analyzed. The waiver also assured the participants' anonymity when creating the recordings and transcriptions. The interviews lasted between forty-five and sixty minutes and were recorded both via iPhone and laptop computer, to provide an additional layer of assurance, should technical issues arise. During the interviews, I wrote all notes by hand, in order to provide a more comfortable, genuine, and natural environment. After the successful recording of the interviews, I transcribed them and used a pseudonym to assure anonymity.

3.3.3 Transcription

The following rules were followed for transcription:

- In the transcription the interviewer and interviewees are marked as first initial and the number of the chronological order of the interview. For example, the first interview was with Christopher, so he is denoted with **C1**, and I am denoted with **J1**. Statements that are personal or contain sensitive information were also anonymized.
- Asterisks ** denote verbal interruption between the interviewer and interviewee while conversing during the interview. Asterisks also denote outside disruptions such as such as an interruption from a third party, background noise, or technological disruption.
- Brackets [] denote all other fillers or interruptions such as coughing, laughter, or disruption from an outside party/ technological disruptions. For example, a cough is indicated as such, [**coughs**].
- Repeated words were kept in the transcription as I felt they added linguistic meaning and understanding.
- Irrelevant or unimportant sections of the analysis were omitted in the transcription and marked with (...).
- Time stamps denote which specific passages are being referred to when cited in the text, for example, (**Gernot, Interview 4, 25:06; 26:11**).

3.4 Evaluation Procedure

The method utilized for evaluating is the Qualitative Content Analysis according to Mayring. The goal of the content analysis is for the techniques to be used in a systematic, intersubjective, and verifiable manner, while also highlighting the complexity of the linguistic material. Material stemming from one type of communication is analyzed, i.e. texts, images, music, etc. Regardless of the type of communication, it must be presented in a recorded form only, which the participants and myself speak in fixed communication. The analysis follows explicit rules, allowing for tracing and verification to occur. Thus, the analysis complies with the social science methodological standards. Another important aspect is that it is theory-driven. The material is examined through a theoretically based question. The theoretical background is the basis for the interpretation of the results and should thus be linked to experiences of the current state of research (Mayring 2015, 10-13). During the evaluation, mainly pre-assumptions will be

processed. However, new categories may also be recognized. In any case, it is important to provide feedback for the theoretical framework. (Vogt & Werner 2014, 10-11).

The method of interpretation is a summary of the material which is then put into inductive categorization. “The object of the analysis is to reduce the material in such a way that the essential contents remain, in order to create through abstraction a comprehensive overview of the base material which is nevertheless still an image of it” (Mayring 74).

An important aspect of the summary’s use of content analysis is to determine the level of abstraction. The material is to be generalized using *macro-operators of reduction* (omit, generalize, bundle, ...). This is a step-by-step process, consisting of seven steps. In the first step, the units of analysis must be determined (Coding unit, Context unit and Recording unit). The Coding unit is the smallest component that can be coded. The Context unit is the largest unit used in coding, and the Recording unit describes which documents are analyzed using the category system (Mayring 2015, 70).

3.4.1 Question and Material of the Analysis

The analysis focuses on previously existing communication material, which must be precisely defined at the beginning (Mayring 2015, 54-58). The core of the analysis is comprised of the transcriptions made after the interviews.

Based on the content-analytical communication model (Mayring 2015, 59), the analysis is concerned with analyzing both the emotional background and the action background. The interviewees should provide information about their emotional state and their relationship to the subject matter. Additionally, their intentions and previous actions should be reflected, and their desires and intentions should be named.

3.4.2 Considerations for the Analysis

The interviews were reviewed, and relevant passages were identified. The unit of analysis are all statements that refer to the research question. These passages were paraphrased in the first reduction and generalized in the second one. Later, the text passages were assigned to first categories. The previously created categories were bundled and processed again. I developed categories for the interview, that I conducted and compiled into my own system of categories.

During the review, drafts were then combined and revised. After the summary, the material was shortened but the essential content has still been saved (Mayring 2015, 85).

When creating the survey, categories were deductively formed from the theory, outlining the interview questions, and assuring that all points were addressed during the interview. These categories also form the main categories of the analysis. After the material was explored and intensively studied, subcategories were developed based on the material. The main categories are only used to structure the analysis under which the newly created subcategories can be found. The connection of the categories leads to the category system presented. Anchor examples have been found for each category. Now the statements of the interviews can be assigned according to the category system and verified. For the coding, Mayring's online tool QCAmap was used (as it specifically focuses on Qualitative Content Analysis).

After coding and analyzing the interviews, the data was organized into an initial ten categories and 27 subcategories (which can be found in the appendix). Following the list of categories and subcategories in the appendix is a table which defines each category as well as provides an anchor example from the transcriptions. The categories and subcategories were further reduced to create the following three themes: Body Identity, Culture, and Community.

3.5 Positionality

As previously mentioned, I proudly identify as a member of the Bear Community, using the labels Cub, Chub, and Bear to describe myself. Although I have a beard as well as the build of bear, I consider myself to be only moderately hirsute. I do not consider myself to be a chaser as I find all attraction to all body shapes. Stepping out of the lens of the Bear Community, I also identify as a white, fat, gay, cis-gendered man. I grew up in the U.S. in a midwestern family and was raised Catholic (although I no longer consider myself a religious person). Another critical fact and aspect of my positionality is the fact that I had my outing in Vienna, Austria in 2019, one year before the Coronavirus Pandemic. I consider myself very fortunate to have had a year to explore Vienna's Gay Community and Bear Community prior to entering lockdown. My sense of both Bear and Gay identity were shaped largely in part due to gay dating apps (Growlr more so than Grindr). I would also like to note that I am still a relatively new member to the Bear and Gay Communities (around five years). I view Vienna (and much of Europe) to be a progressive

safe space for queer people when compared to the conservative midwestern background provided in Ohio. When friends and acquaintances ask how I find “gay life” in America, I facetiously respond with “Good question! I have no idea how to [be] gay in America!” As a result, I find comfort and solace in not only Vienna, but also Austrian culture and the German language. While my initial aim was to also analyze the gender and racial aspect of the phrase “No Fats, No Fems, No Asians”, I decided it would be more proper, beneficial, and insightful (and for purposes of positionality) to research and analyze my own subculture. It is critical to produce scholarship that one can relate to in order to understand, further shape and develop, as well as share our world view. I recognize my privilege as a white, cis male, but also acknowledge the discrimination I face as a fat, gay, man.

4. Results

This chapter provides an overview of the results of the interviews, transcriptions, and codes/categories (acquired from the transcriptions). First, I will discuss the overall narrative, which the interviewees provided, followed by a small profile of each interviewee. Lastly, I will discuss the resulting categories and codes and their relationship to the research goals, research question, and overall narrative. The transcriptions resulted in ten categories and 27 subcategories. There were three central themes, which recurringly spanned the categories and subcategories. These three themes, which I will discuss in the following sections include: Body Identity, Culture, and Community. A complete chart of all categories and subcategories can be found in the appendix.

4.1 Overview of Results

With the exception of one interviewee (although he briefly used apps in the past), all interviewees used apps. Most use the apps daily while a couple use them weekly. All interviewees expressed that they were confident with their bodies but paused to contemplate when answering this question. Four out of seven of the interviewees experienced some form of discrimination on the basis of appearance, ranging from fatness, age, nationality, to being “not bearish enough”/ too slim (those participants who identify as chasers). Those who were partnered were all in open relationships. Most agreed that they use the apps to meet new people and to keep up to date with bear events. Sexual experiences are undoubtedly a part of using the app,

however, this is not always the most central or important intention when online. There were mixed intentions and experiences when discussing online/offline experiences and sense of community (this is a personal definition and experience). Almost all interviewees did not use apps when first coming out. This was largely (but not exclusively) due to age. Two of the interviewees are a couple and felt they did not need to find gay community at the time of their outing because they had each other and shared many of their first experiences together. Another interviewee was not ready to explore apps at the time of his outing, but eventually tried them when he felt ready and comfortable and continues to use them semi-regularly. Some used online chatrooms, websites such as Craigslist, and web-based applications (such as Romeo), which is now also a mobile app. Compared to all other categories and questions in the interviews, the topic of fetish proved to be the most controversial and having the most varying opinions ranging from positive, negative, to neutral. In terms of bear identity, only one interviewee explicitly did not identify as a bear or a part of the community. Two interviewees identified as chasers (they were both skinny and athletic, not fat) and felt that they do belong and are part of the community, but perhaps not as much as a bear would. The general consensus amongst the interviewees was that discrimination and exclusion takes place in both the bear community and LGBTQ+ community, however, the bear community aims to and tends to be more welcoming (compared to other subcultures and their own internal exclusions and discriminations against each other). Lastly, almost all the interviewees did not use apps to find community during their outing.

4.2 Overview of Interviews and Interviewees

Interview 1 was conducted with Christopher, a 33-year-old white, gay, cis, nursing student from the U.S. He uses the apps for friendship, community (online and offline), and for sexual encounters. He met his husband of 10 years on Growlr; they are in an open marriage. Chris enjoys working with kids, playing sports, and embracing his pup persona. He does not identify as a Bear but identifies as a chaser, a pup, and sometimes a cub.

Interview 2 was conducted with Brad, a 51-year-old white, gay, cis, academic from the U.S. He enjoys going to bear runs and socializing with other bears. He uses a wide variety of apps that pertain to bears and kink. He chooses to use the apps in a more discreet manor, due to his position as an educator. He is single and identifies as a bear and a daddy.

Interview 3 was conducted with Hans, a 41-year-old white, gay, cis man, who works in digital media. He is from Austria and enjoys technology and films. He uses apps for meeting new people and sexual encounters. He is partnered, in an open relationship, and identifies as a chaser.

Interview 4 was conducted with Gernot, a 41-year-old white, gay, cis man, who works in Education. He is from Austria and enjoys cooking and being social with other bears. He uses the apps for meeting new people and sexual encounters. He is partnered, in an open relationship, and identifies as a bear.

Interview 5 was conducted with Pedro, a 33-year-old Hispanic, gay, cis student from Spain. He enjoys travel, maps, and urban exploration. He uses the apps more for meeting new people and occasionally for sexual encounters. He is partnered, in an open relationship and does not identify as a bear nor part of the community. However, Pedro considers himself to be a bear admirer.

Interview 6 was conducted with Moritz, (age not given) a white, cis, gay man from Germany. He works for a non-governmental organization, enjoys the Eurovision Song Contest as well as comics featuring superheroes. Although he has used apps before, he no longer enjoys them and does not use them anymore. He prefers to meet people in person naturally and without the aid of apps. He is partnered and in an open relationship.

Interview 7 was conducted with Klaus, a 52-year-old white, cis, academic from Austria. He is a very active and social member of the bear community and enjoys the arts. He uses apps for meeting new people with the potential for friends with benefits as he is not into meaningless hookups. He is partnered and in an open relationship.

In some cases, the interview guideline was followed quite strictly (while still elaborating further and answering the questions openly and freely) while in other cases it was used more flexibly.

4.3 Body Identity, Culture, and Community

As previously mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the ten categories and 27 subcategories were synthesized into three themes to provide more ease for synthesizing and understanding the material (while also flowing in the pattern of a narrative). The three themes of Body Identity,

Culture, and Community and their significance to the interviewee and interview are summarized and discussed in the following sections.

4.3.1 Body Identity

The category Body Identity discusses the interviewees personal definition of a bear, their relationship with their own body, as well as personal experiences with discrimination and fetish.

4.3.2 Physical Appearance

Body, physical appearance, and various other characteristic traits are the foundation of the bear community. Despite being a subculture, that largely relies on looks as a form of identity, the bear community would likely not exist, if it weren't for certain bodily attributes and features such as body weight (both fat and muscle), beard, hirsuteness, having a belly, and often having a bald head. Although personal opinions can differ from what a bear is to what bear is not, there is some consensus on the definition of a bear. There is a general element body mass, bears tend to weigh more or are even overweight, but not all display this (i.e., a muscle bear³⁴). Bears are stereotypically hairier, however, not all men have the same level of hirsuteness. There is an element of rugged masculinity to the bear look that is much less embraced and displayed by the twink community. In Interview 1, Christopher defined a bear in the following manner:

Well, so bear is just a typical label for somebody who is who may be either bigger, hairier, or it maybe it could just be their personality is very bearish and very cuddly and very loving. Their, their humor is there. They're very funny, sometimes. But that's what makes up a bear. In my opinion, it's just- they're, they're very welcoming. They're bigger, they're hairier, and cuddly. And so that's a bear... if you're in the right headspace, you could be a bear too. So it doesn't have to be physical, it's the mentality for sure.

(Christopher, Interview1, 35:52, 38:20)

³⁴ "One development in the subcultural definition of the bear body that potentially undermines the extent to which the community resists weight stigma is the creation of the "muscle bear" category. Especially notable in the narratives of men from the Bay Area, the muscle bear is best described as a bear that is bulky and hairy, with clear muscular definition. Aaron described the average muscle bear: "It's super muscular. Very confident. When they walk into the bars, people stare at them." (McGrady 1719) "Grow the Beard, Wear the Costume": Resisting Weight and Sexual Orientation Stigmas in the Bear Subculture. Patrick B. McGrady

Although Christopher pays homage to many of the stereotypical bear features and descriptors, he also states an important and less discussed concept that being a bear is a mentality just as much as it is a physical feature. In his opinion, neither the physicality nor the mentality is exclusive.

While Christopher provides a widely accepted definition of a bear, he also provides his own personal flare, resulting in a balanced definition. Hans has a personal definition of bear that he uses in Interview 2. Based on his own personal definition, he does not consider himself to be a bear. According to Hans:

I don't identify myself as a bear simply because I have my own basically definition of it. And I guess that's a common definition I have. But I am not big. I'm not hairy. Basically, I just in quotes 'have a beard'. But in my opinion, that doesn't- that's not the definition of a bear for -for me personally. I am quite aware that the definition of a bear is broad, *absolutely* can be different for everybody, *for sure*... Secondly, I'm totally fine with that. In fact, I quite appreciate that you know, that it's not so set in stone. And that definition is a broad one and I have been called bear. Although -although I don't feel like one. (Hans, Interview 2, 23:19, 32:53)

Despite the strong emphasis on body-specific attributes in the bear community, Hans highlights the importance and embracing of individuality in the bear community. This mindset allows for the community grow and evolve in a positive light insofar as creating and coining new labels via reappropriation. This allows not only for visibility and celebration of diversity in the bear community, but also in the greater LGBTIQ+ community. Klaus highlights the empowering involvement in his definition and understanding of what a bear is. In Interview 7, Klaus states:

I love the term-I love the term bear. I love the term chub. And I love- I use them for myself. I, I mean, let me ask here more analytically, insofar as these terms have had a tremendously empowering potential. They're not just potential reality to a lot of people. They're amazing. I mean, the fact that I mean, I'm not even talking about fat as a reappropriated term, which is also amazing, but a term like chub is, is, you know, when it first came into currency in the '80s, to basically re not just reappropriate. But re-imagine

what is normal normatively speaking, a flaw i.e. fatness, and come up with a term that is intrinsically endearing and meant as, as something that is not just endearing, but sexually desirable, is an incredible act of communal empowerment. So I'm like, all for all of these terms (Klaus, Interview 7, 16:41).

The reading and usage of the descriptors “fat” and “chub” to define bear not only demonstrates queer cultural progression, but also a continual strive for inclusion and empowerment. Later in the interview, Klaus mentions his happiness and excitement that the term trans bear is largely becoming common and normalized in the bear community. The coining and utilization of new terms and labels such as trans bear is important to Klaus because it not only represents an echelon of “social cultural creativity” as he puts it, but also the level of acceptance and inclusion that the Bear Community is capable of achieving. Although the Christopher, Hans, and Klaus demonstrated that a bear can be defined in a plethora of ways, it is important to note that there are a few basic formulas to bear in mind: (pun intended) there’s a subcultural set of adjective and descriptors that overlap one another and are used interchangeably, the definition of bear can be personal, a bear can be defined with empowerment and inclusion in mind.

Lastly, Klaus discusses how the term “bear” originally evolved from “Girth and Mirth”, as well as how its coinage allows for even more diversity and inclusion:

I will also say that I'm also old enough that the term bear existed when I came out, I think, but the much more dominant term at that point in broadly speaking in this world was Girth and Mirth, and chubby and chaser, and bear sort of had its ascendance a little later. So I came out in 1990. And I became aware of Girth and Mirth, you know, within a couple of years. I mean, that was really also only getting started. But it was really not until the mid to late 90s, that bear culture really caught on in a massive way. I'm perfectly happy about frankly, I like the bear community as a term better, it's more endearing to me. I also like the fact that bear is, is actually quite diverse and open in terms of types, whereas chubby chaser is actually quite defined and has this kind of weird dyadic relationship that implies a target and someone who aims for that target, which is

obviously an issue for anyone, you know, who's mindful of these kinds of power differentials. (Klaus Interview 7, 37:00)

The use of the Bear is more inclusive and reaches more members, as well as potential members of the community.

4.3.3 Personal Relationship with Own Body

Despite all of these body types and labels, it is important to note that body image and perception (much like the definition of a bear) is rather personal and can vary. For Example, a person who finds their body to be unattractive may be desirable in the eyes of others (i.e., chasers/ fat men and their admirers). When the topic of personal relationship with the interviewees' own bodies arose during the interviews, it proved to be a quite sensitive subject. Generally, the interviewees had positive relationship with their own bodies but were hesitant to say yes when asked if satisfied with their own bodies. Furthermore, a number of interviewees stated that, although they now have a good relationship with their body, this was not always the case, and it took them awhile to reach this point. Pedro, the only interviewee who did not identify as a bear or a member of the bear community (though he identifies as a bear admirer) stated that he felt uncomfortable with his body because he was too skinny. Pedro states:

I am now happy with my body. Um, I was, um for years before, I was not because I was really skinny, and I don't like to be like the skinny boy like everyone. Yeah, of course it's not the worst thing ever or something but it was for me like an issue, and I had some I had issue that I'm really skinny. I don't like it. Yeah, yeah, I'm no, now I'm happy. I'm happy with my body (Pedro, Interview 5, 14:01).

It is also important to note that, although Pedro is both toned and slimmer, he is also not a chaser, he sits at an intersection where he can be interpreted as part of this dynamic. With informed perspective, he looks either from the side or above the Bear Community, not the inside. Pedro provides us with an aspect of desire that flirts and is entwined within both the definition and appearance of a Bear.

Regardless of subculture or community, we may never know whether someone is happy with their appearance or not and hence, should never make assumptions. For example, despite having an athletic build, Christopher confides how he (to a small extent) wishes he was more bearish. “Got it. No, I think I am. I am happy with my body. I just wish I just wish I was hairier and bigger. But I can’t and that’s okay.” (Christopher, Interview 1, 25:49)

On a similar yet different note, Brad discusses how he’s comfortable in his big, Bear, body, but also discloses that he wishes he could drop some of the weight he gained during the pandemic:

I’m still a full 35 pounds of COVID weight. But I’ve had, as [person] may have told you, I’ve had two surgeries during this time period, and that has really set me back. And I mean, it’s nothing serious. It’s just that, you know, it’s enough of a surgery that you can’t do a lot of movement, and you’re laid up for six weeks. And you have to be careful how you move after that, and blah, blah, blah. And so right now, I wish I could get rid of that weight. And in fact, I talked to my doctor about the new drugs that are on the market, but I’m one of those on the cusp people I don’t have diabetes. And so I- my insurance probably won’t pay for the new drugs. That might be helpful. And so I’ve got to just figure it out myself and figure out how to get how to drop some of this weight. So right now I’m heavier than I would like to be but in general, I’m okay with my body. I’m okay with how everything is I’m comfortable being naked in front of people. *mhm* I’m fine. (Brad, Interview 2, 28:18).

Hans, who identifies as a chaser, opens up about how he is now happy with his body, however, it took him awhile to reach this positive relationship:

So, the honest truth is that I -that for the for the longest time, I had not a good relationship with my body, I was really like being rather depressed about it about my my, my shape. And it goes actually, so far, for for example, I had the longest time the impression that I had on not just the impression, I had quite the big man boobs, you know, they developed when I was in my late teens, and I always like felt really, really uncomfortable being being naked in the in in public and in general just not not happy

basically with with my body. So, this this led to also quite some low low self-esteem, you know, and like the aftereffects basically come from it. But I assume at some point in my in my early 30s or middle middle 30s I actually got the idea to start doing sports a bit more. And then I realized how one's body can transform and that actually helped me a lot to appreciate the body that much more. So I would say over time I have developed now quite a good relationship with my body. But that is also but is I if if I could like if there was a magic fairy that It will come and say, Do you want to change? So of course, things would change. I would, for example, by myself would love to look more bearish, like being general chunkier and hairier. Because it would be it would make make me be able to access more people. (Hans, Interview 3, 28:10)

Lastly, Gernot provides us with an interesting and insightful perspective (which can often be overlooked) when he expresses both satisfaction and concern with his body:

I would say I'm pretty comfortable with -with how I look like. The thing is, though, what I -I mean, it is still a health issue. You know, we all know that as much as like looking at it. We know that like being chubby is not a healthy lifestyle *Yeah*, so I'm getting a little bit on point, I have to think about this, you know, this is something I have to do something about. Because I would say that, you know, problems are already starting. Because I don't know if it comes with age, or it comes with weight, but weight is probably part of it. (Gernot, Interview 4, 27:08).

Although all of the participants express some level of comfort with their body, it is important to note that this was not always the case. The relationship with one's own is not only deeply personal, but complex and constantly evolving and changing overtime. Profile pictures may offer a different insight to how an app user really feels about or perceives themselves. Most notably, all participants alluded to the concept of desiring or longing for what we don't have, (i.e., wanting to be bigger, hairier, and more bearish instead of a chaser, or happy being a bear but also wanting to be healthy and weigh a bit less.

4.3.4 Discrimination (Ranging from Weight, to Thinness to, Exclusion)

Over half of the interviewees experienced some sort of discrimination on the apps due to their appearance, identity, and presumed assumptions. Examples of discrimination ranged from a chaser's experience of exclusion for being "too thin and not bearish enough" to a chubby bear receiving unsolicited advice on how to be healthier and lose weight, to being ignored by bears as a chaser. In addition to discrimination, bears also face fetishization, which has mixed perceptions. An example of discrimination due to body politics (which simultaneously highlight a critical difference between apps) is Brad's experiences on non-bearish apps. Brad states:

I mean, well, I'll be honest, I'm not on Grindr or Scruff, because there's so much bias against older people and heavy people. And you can just only take that kind of that kind of negative feedback so often. And so like, once in a while, when I travel, I might download Scruff, just for, you know, a day or two just because there's a bigger selection of people. But um so I have I have popped onto scruff a few times. And of course, if I'm hanging out with a friend, I might be looking at their Grindr or their Scruff, you know. So you see what people are saying at other people. And it just seems so skewed towards younger, thinner people, *for sure*. And I figured that people who want bigger and older people know to gravitate towards a different kind of site. And why bother fighting against that? Because I don't really necessarily need a twink. So why? Why force myself to be on Scruff, and listen to criticism? So- *sure* Yeah, so that's, that's why I stick with these two. And these two have worked out great for me (Brad, Interview 2, 09:26, 09:37).

Although (non-bearish) apps such as Grindr and Scruff demonstrate discrimination against age and weight, as per Brad's experiences, he is happy that Growlr offers a more inclusive community, to which he belongs.

While Christopher has not dealt with any personal experiences of discrimination, he is well aware of how it affects his friends and others, due to their sharing via social media posts.

Christopher recalls:

I, I'm not sure if I have felt that myself. But I have seen it's -it's pretty apparent. You can look on Instagram or Facebook of other people's experiences of discrimination for sure.

And they screenshot it and they show their friends how- how awful people can be to somebody's body. And thing very negative things about their appearance, or why -why are you even on here? If you're -if you don't want to hook up? Or why are you even showing those types of pictures for everyone to see. It's disgusting. And that kind of behavior is that's -that's just not acceptable. And I can't even imagine the types of people that would want to do that. And why? Because what's -what's the point in bringing someone down, if you're trying to look for somebody on a dating app, to spend time with, like, if you don't like somebody, move on, go -go to somebody else, don't bring them down (Chris, Interview 1, 22:59)

Chris offers insightful contemplation for not only the bear community, but the entire LGBTQI+ community. Several of the participants mentioned they feel that Grindr is neither the most bear friendly app nor the most welcoming of diversity. Pedro was the only participant who did not find Grindr to be so negative. It is also important to recall that Pedro is neither a bear nor a chaser and has a thin, toned body shape.

Hans' experiences with discrimination differed when compared to the experiences of Brad and Christopher. When asked if he experienced discrimination, Hans responded with the following remark:

To be honest, only in a sense of like being -being ignored, basically... I mean yeah, I think I think it's just being ignored. That's That's discrimination. But as I said, I feel Yeah, yeah. As I said, I also, basically do it myself, because you, oftentimes you just don't have the time. Basically. There's no intention behind it. Yeah. But that's discrimination. You know, and I'm also talking specifically on the apps not in real life. (Hans, Interview 3, 24:52)

As previously mentioned, Hans does not identify as a bear, both due to being a slim chaser, as well as the fact that he has his own personal definition of what a bear is (which he does not fit, per his definition and standard). This reflection from Hans provides valuable insight with how “internal discrimination” functions within the Bear Community. Despite being a chaser and not a

bear, Hans' exclusion from certain bearish conversations and experiences via the apps, only further emphasizes the fact that the Bear Community is largely based off looks (and also often "lookist"). Hans goes into further depth about the "chaser and chub" dynamic, that is so prevalent in the Bear Community:

...it's more likely than not that the bearish types are into bearish types themselves also only so like, the chances that they're interested in a chaser is in my, in my experience, in general, or statistically maybe a bit lower. So that too can feel to emotions of being discriminated... I mean, I that's that's basically oftentimes the thing the reason that that you are get ghosted on on apps? Because if you're basically not, like, bearish enough, not hairy enough, you just won't get a response. Yeah. And they can be very depressing. If you just happen to have this fetish (Hans, Interview 3, 25:45; 27:75)

In addition to Hans, Brad also has experienced discrimination between bears and chasers. It is important to note that Brad did not participate in the discriminatory experiences, rather he witnessed them from the side. Brad recounts his experiences with a bear group based in Columbus, Ohio, USA:

Well, some places it is. So Columbus is two hours south of me. And I've hung out with some bears in Columbus, and they're pretty shitty to thin people. *Really*? Yeah, I've seen some bears just kind of push some chasers away and say, back off. This party is not for you. And that's surprising to me. But there was some kind of there's kind of a militant air among that group of bears in Columbus. (Brad, Interview 2, 35:46)

Lastly, Moritz discusses his experience on receiving unsolicited advice regarding his weight:

Well let's say I didn't feel discrimination but there are some parts which well as a -as a chubby person, I felt a lot of discrimination and people are very übergriffig I don't know how you say that in English *invasive*. And they they feel that they have the right to give me advice and that it's very very annoying sometimes and it's you feel a kind of.. (Moritz, Interview 6, 17:56)

The previous passage demonstrate that discrimination happens from various angles such as body shape (fat and thin), general negative commentary on physical appearance, as well as offering unsolicited advice due to physical appearing. A separate section specifically for exclusions was added, since the exclusions which were discussed in the interviews also extend to the whole LGBTQ Community and in many cases coincided with discrimination experiences.

4.3.5 Exclusions

The following section focuses on the various exclusionary experiences which apply to not only the Bear Community, but the LGTBQ+ Community. When prompted to share his opinion of exclusions within the Bear and LGBTQ Communities, Gernot stated the following:

Exclusionary? I'm afraid -I'm afraid we are. I'm afraid we are. The thing is, you know, we, we always, we all I mean, we're quick, when it comes to -when we feel discrimination from the outside, then we are sort of blind when we, when we see it on the inside. And I think that, especially you know, that some gays can be really harsh when they -when they -when they show others that, you know, they're not their type or they don't want to do anything with them. And I think the, the apps just increased the problem rather than decreased it in a *for sure*, because communication happens so fast on there, you know, and I think if you are like, part of the, of a group that's already, you know, sort of a minority in the gay community, I think that you are that you deal with problems pretty quickly. And I remember an Asian friend of mine, that he really got, like hate messages, you know, *that's horrible* and people he didn't even reached out, you know, he himself that just -just -just sends on, sends him a hate message, you know, and that's something like, even to for this people. Even that the fact that they feel entitled to do this tells us something about this community in general and because apparently, they think that it's just a normal thing to do. And that's something we need to address. (Gernot, Interview 4, 32:10)

At a further point in the interview, Gernot also highlighted the fact that: “We demand quality on the outside but we don’t wort towards equality on the inside.” In addition to Gernot, Pedro

mentions how generally, the LGBTQ Community is selfish and quick to forget that other communities and subcultures exist and deserve space as well. Pedro discusses:

But of course, there was people also that discriminate others. Also, I will say, and I know people, I mean, gay people who also only met gay people. So gay men, I want to say gay men just wants to be with gay men and not with lesbians, not with trans and they have. They have no interest in the other parts of the communities like -I don't give a shit. I'm here and that's it. *Unfortunately, there's a lot of truth in that* and I saw that and also less because I don't know so many but also happens sometimes with this lesbian community. There is, of course some of these girls when you are in this space with this lesbian community, I would say they are sometimes looking at you like, 'what are you doing here?' ... we are in the same community; we need to be together. (Pedro, Interview 5, 19:00)

This once again, reiterates the fact that there is work to be done in all communities and subcultures in the queer community. The final topic of body identity (discussed in the next section) is fetishization.

4.3.6 Fetishization

The last topic in the category body identity is fetishization. To be a Bear comes with fetishization and the potential of over sexualization. Bears are fetishized by themselves and others due to their hairy appearance, beards, muscle, and fat. Chasers are part of the community but can be casted as an outsider due to their appearance. Perhaps the bear mindset on appearance can be paralleled to the phrase “no fats, no femmes, no Asians”, i.e., not hairy enough, not chubby enough, too young. When discussed in the interviews, fetishization proved to have the most varied and diverse perspectives. Since the topic and mindset of fetishization proved to have the most diverse answers among the participants, a table was created to better understand and interpret the results.

Participant	Likes being fetishized	Fetishizes others	Finds Fetish positive,	Other

			negative, neutral	
1.) Christopher	Yes	Yes	Generally positive but can also be negative without communication and consent	Mentioned pup play and that it is enjoyable with consent but can be harmful depending on pup and handler ³⁵ dynamic
2.) Brad	Yes, but likes to know about it up front before meeting someone in person	Yes	Positive but only with communication, consent, and mutual respect	Has experienced that people get angry when they find out he has limits as a kinky person.
3.) Hans	Yes	Yes	Positive as it allows for community and inclusion of „others “	We can't help or control our attractions and fetishes.
4.) Gernot	Yes	Yes	Negative if cause exclusions, neutral, fetish is	The bear community is perhaps the most

³⁵ According to pupspace.net: “A handler is the term for a person who enjoys role playing as someone who takes care of a pup. Handlers can take many forms, from a nurturing caretaker to a firm leash-holder to an obedience trainer to a dom or Sir. The relationship between handlers and pups can be romantic, sexual, or even platonic.” <https://www.pupspace.net/enUS/Home/FAQ#:~:text=A%20handler%20is%20the%20term,%2C%20sexual%2C%20or%20even%20platonic.>

			part of what we find attractive and why on the apps	fetishized subculture in the gay community. Oversexualize hair, bears, belly, fat, muscle, the male body in general.
5.) Pedro	No	No, rather finds someone attractive, not fetishized	Neutral, it is ok with consent, but can be harmful when a person is objectified too much	Thinks it's possible that people may fetishize him by virtue of where he comes from.
6.Moritz	Yes	Yes	Positive but only if there is consent	Was shocked to find out about the chub/chaser dynamic and that his body is fetishized. Initially fetishized body builders and thought his body should look like theirs. This is no longer the case.

7.) Klaus	Yes	Yes*	Complex and difficult to define- mostly positive but can also be negative	*Rather considers attraction to be a preference, not fetish. To him, fetish becomes an unhealthy obsession when it controls one's daily life. Just like we prefer certain vegetables over others, we have certain sexual preferences.
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As a concluding observation to fetish, Brad adds very valuable insight on how the bear community intersects with the fetish subcultures of leather and kink:

Well, maybe I'll say something about the intersection of bear and leather and kink. *sure* So um, you know, I think there is a fairly healthy mix of bear and leather and kink people. And, you know, here Cleveland has a big leather event. And I started going to that event because they used to have bear parties. And they'd have one night where they'd have a bear party. And so that was my little dipping my toe into what the leather community was like. And then as I kind of moved into my Daddy Bear phase, I kept getting asked to do lots more kink stuff, and being pursued by more chasers and boys *mhm*-subs. And I had to learn how to do some kink stuff. And so I like the fact that the leather community accepts bears being part of it, and that bears except people being kind

of kinky. *mhm* Well, and that, that, that was a natural progression for me. And and that's why, you know, I'm on Recon³⁶ as well. But again, you know, clearly that I'm the- I'm a bear, I'm not really like a muscle leather guy, but a bear guy. And so I do think that that that combination is one that you find a lot all over the place and I'm not the drag queen kind of bear. Not that there's anything wrong with that. But you know, I'm, I'm, I'm just not built or wired that way. I'm kind of wired more to be more maybe on the masculine side of the spectrum.. And, and so that was a natural way for me to go. (Brad Interview 2, 52:56).

These intersections indicate a healthy and positive coexistence amongst and in various subcultures. Brads concluding remark on how he prefers to be a masculine bear instead of a drag queen bear is indicative of the traditional bear masculinity as previously indicated by Hennen.

4.4 Culture

In the following section, the Gernot gives insight to what bear culture is. Compared to other participants, Gernot discussed Bear Cultures in a somewhat more detail. Online and offline aspects of Bear Cultural (and Community) will be discussed in section 4.5 Gernot communicates how he feels that the Bear Community is lacking in having an active culture in Vienne:

So I think we need more like social events, rather than just parties and everything.. especially for the bear community would be nice. And there used to be like this, the Wiener Runde, which used to be a bear organization, they had like, stuff, like, going for hiking trips together and stuff like that, or going to museums, even just going to museum together, you know, have a group experience and like, I don't know, people are like, I find it kind of sad that this just disappeared, you know that we don't have that anymore. (Gernot, Interview 4, 43:45)

³⁶ "Leather, rubber, BDSM and kink.' That's the basis surrounding [Recon](https://www.thepinknews.com/2018/12/07/recon-gay-fetish-app/) gay fetish app. Unlike other gay dating apps, Recon is exclusively for men interested in fetishes. The app gives a platform for the members to talk to other gay men who are into the same things as them." <https://www.thepinknews.com/2018/12/07/recon-gay-fetish-app/>

Gernot's insights demonstrate how Bears are social and (have based) their culture around social events and gatherings as mentioned above. Gernot feels that more bear events need to be introduced in Vienna, in order to have a more active and vibrant Bear Culture. During his interview, Gernot mentioned that he had the idea of founding a Bear cooking club before COVID occurred:

I always wanted to have a bear cooking club. *I love that!*, you know, it's something like the books -like a book club, you know, when people read a book in advance and and discuss it, they're never thinking, why not prepare something in advance and then come up, like, you know, you'd prepare dessert, and I prepare like a main course. And then everybody tastes it, like, there's three people, so a couple of people meeting, and like three of them, like, prepare something to cook together. And I would actually love to have something like this, because the especially the bear community, I mean, I don't know if you know, that. That it used to be much bigger. In Vienna, there used to be like, several institutions, organizations, that sort of, you know, and it's stopped at one point, you know, and all we have now is like, weekly bear sauna thing, and, and then a monthly clubbing, you know, that's, that's about it. And I would really love to have some -some kind of social events, you know, because I think we need something like this, rather than yet another app or yet another, yet another party, I think. Because I've come across a lot of people who say, okay, they can't find, they can't find love on these apps. And they kind of want that, you know, because I think they're just not intended to find love, you know, that *it's really, really hard*. Yeah, exactly. But that's, that's not, - what I mean. Yeah, I think, I mean, I can't think of ways how that would actually work. You know, I think the people who really find a partner online and fall in love it, I think it's more the exception than the rule. (Gernot Interview 4, 41:21)

Gernot alludes to how many near groups and organizations in Vienna have disbanded, as well as the fact that the Bear Community is lacking in events and an active social life with the exception of a weekly bear night at the gay sauna and a monthly bear night at a local gay club. Gernot's mention of the lack of social events for Bears in Vienna shows that Bears are social beings, enjoy company, food, and bonding. For many Bears, partying and clubbing is not important. While the

apps are better than nothing and provide some aspect of social potential, they also make it difficult to find genuine and budding romance. Gernot believes that it is rather difficult to find love on the apps.

4.5 Community Experiences (On/Offline)

To an extent, the bear community exists on the basis of lookism. There are some specific and certain elements that make up “the bear look”. Unfortunately, this can lead to exclusions if a person is “not bearish enough” (both within the group and with outsiders). Internal inclusions for example, occur, mostly amongst chasers and bears/chubs => hunter vs. hunted dynamic. Many bears are not attracted to the slimmer body of a chaser which then leads to the rejection and exclusion of a chaser. However, some bears are exclusively only attracted to thin and muscular men such as chasers. In addition to body-specific exclusions, the bear community has also been known to be exclusionary toward race at times, as bears of color have largely felt excluded from the bear community.

Despite these internal exclusions, the bear community is generally considered to be a more welcoming community. Bears are social, friendly, and enjoy having a good time. Furthermore, much progression has been displayed by the bear community as terms and labels such as “lesbear” and “transbear” have been coined and are becoming more mainstream and accepted (also mentioned in the interviews).

Both online and offline communities exist within the bear community. In terms of online and offline community, Growlr is undoubtedly the go-to app for bears, with Scruff serving as a happy medium in Between Grindr and Growlr. Offline community exists as well in the form of bear social groups, bear bars, bear weeks/weekends as travel destinations. Below is a table, which discusses use of apps to find community in more detail.

Participant	Online Community (apps)	Offline Community (without apps)	Offline community as result of apps	Role of apps in identity/ at time of outing	Other
1.) Chris	Yes	Yes	Yes	Met bearish men he was more interested in, gay rugby team, as well as husband of 10 years on Growlr	
2.) Brad	Yes	Yes	Yes and No: His offline bear club had to disband due to lack of funds. They keep in touch via Growlr now.	N/A: Came out in 80s. Uses Growlr as main source of communication for bear friends and groups.	Finds Grindr and Scruff to be exclusionary toward people who are old and fat. Also find Community on Leather, Kink, and BDSM Apps such as Recon
3.) Hans	No	Yes	Yes, goes on holiday with friends met on Growlr	No	Finds bear community to be more welcoming and gentler. Uses an app W-Bear, in

					addition to Growlr
4.) Gernot	No	Yes	Yes, goes on holiday with friends met on Growlr. Would not have known about event in Spain with 40 other bears if it weren't for Growlr	No	Believes app users should highlight what they are attracted to (positive), and not what they do not like.
5.) Pedro	No	No	No	Did not use apps during outing	Finds community offline through friends. Neither a chaser nor member of Bear Community but considers himself a bear admirer.
6.) Moritz	No	Yes	No	N/A	Prefers to meet friends offline
7.) Klaus	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A	Uses app to make

					friends and develop community in person
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4.6 Interpretation of Results

The results demonstrate a complex understanding and synthesis of Body Identity, Culture, and Community as the candidates described in their personal narratives during interviews. The Bear Community in general is intricate, diverse, but also able to adapt to the times, because community was found offline prior to the apps, whereas it is now largely found online due to the apps and considerable use of cellular telephones. Community is largely a personal journey. In addition to the cultural, societal, and temporal adaptation of the apps, many participants revealed mixed results of how they found community: some online, some offline, some both. For those participants that came out before the emergence of cell phone apps, most used online web applications such as Romeo or chatrooms such as Yahoo! From a personal perspective, I found it very interesting that the apps did not play a role in shaping identity when coming out for any of the participants. As a result, experiences, and community (as well as identity) are personal and can occur online, offline, or both.

After analyzing the transcriptions and codes, it is safe to say that Bears are highly fetishized (both by themselves and others). Their hair, their beard, the fatness, muscle, and even their bearish attitude is celebrated and fetishized. The body and appearance are critical in the Bear Community. Generally, the Bear Community embraces the concept of “what is shunned by one is admired and adored by another”, except for when they discriminate each other. Bears have their own exclusionary ideas of “not hairy enough, not big enough, not bear enough”.

Additionally, members of the Bear Community face the double stigma of being fat and gay: They are stigmatized for their homosexuality by the binary heteronormative society and again by the mainstream Gay Community again for being fat. This stigma also affects chaser but from a reverse perspective. Many bears, though not all, exclude chasers from the bear community because they are thin or muscular or perceived as “not a bear”/ “not bearish enough”.

Despite the sometimes-polarizing perspectives of body shape and size, one aspect that appeared to unify the Bear Community (as discussed by the participants) is the languages and labels that apply and pertain to Bears. All of the participants (to a degree) agreed that the language of the bear community is endearing, positive, comical, and amusing. Some examples of the language discussed (both previously and in the interviews) include otter, cub, daddy bear, grizzly, polar bear, pig, and pup to name only a few! (please note that all of these were previously defined on page). These labels offer not only a sense of inclusion, but also celebrate diversity and endearment.

The combining of body identity and culture to create community is perhaps one of the most important aspects of the bear community as it is what offers visibility, purpose, and inclusion to all members the community. As a result, the bear community is a utopia for all, for different reasons. Chasers are able to freely and openly find and adore fat partners. Muscle bears, who are too big to be a twink, twunk, or hunk, find a place of belonging. Chubs, who face (double) discrimination for being fat, from both heterosexual and queer society, find a place where their body is celebrated and accepted instead of shunned and ridiculed.

Chapter 5 Discussion

While gender expression is personal and thus, difficult to generalize, mainstream gay culture perhaps favors and exhibits more feminine characteristic traits and qualities, whereas the bear community tend to exhibit more masculine qualities⁴⁴. This in no way undermines that there are naturally masculine Twinks (dominant) and effeminate bears (subculture). Finally, bears tend to embrace older age and appearance, as it is seen as a positive steppingstone, whereas other gays elect for cosmetic surgeries at the first and most miniscule sign of ageing. The way in which both subcultural bears and dominant gays handle age is a ritual unique to each group. For example, bears are excluded from shaving whereas dominant gays are included in it. Despite these subcultural differences between Bears and Twinks, it is also important to note that all queer people (be it gay men, bears, Twinks, lesbians), exist as a subculture when compared to

⁴⁴ Embedded within a contemporary gay culture that typically values conventional beauty and youth, bear norms may appear discrepant. Stereotypically, bears are hirsute gay men, whose attractiveness is based upon an aesthetic of maturity and traditional masculinity Eric Manley Med et al. "Understanding the Bear Movement in Gay Male Culture".

heterosexual society as the cultural norm. Halberstam further elaborates and parallels subcultures to rituals. When reflecting on Hall and Butler's discussion of ritual as a function of subculture, Halberstam states the following:

And, building on the work by Hall and others in the classic volume on subcultures Butler puts the concept of "ritual" into motion as a practice that can either reinforce or disrupt cultural norms. Liminal subjects—those who are excluded from "the norms that govern the recognizability of the human"—are sacrificed to maintain coherence within the category of the human, and for them, style is both the sign of their exclusion and the mode by which they survive nonetheless (Halberstam4).

This concept of ritual directly correlates to the bear community due to the specific language, gatherings, and [dress identities], that exist within the community. Those members of the bear community can be considered to be “liminal subjects” due to the fact that they do not adhere to the “queer norm” or standard of gay culture. The golden standard of the gay community is a hairless, slim, and defined [hunk/twunk], whereas the bear community embraces diversity, hair, different body shape, and fatness. The bear community exists in part that they are excluded from gay mainstream culture due to their physical appearance and attributes.

The general consensus amongst the interviewees was that discrimination and exclusion takes place in both the bear community and LGBTQ+ community, however, the bear community aims to and tends to be more welcoming (compared to other subcultures and their own internal exclusions and discriminations against each other). Lastly, almost all of the interviewees did not use apps to find community during their outing.

5.1 Results in Connection with the Current State of Research

Many aspects of the results coincide with the current state of research. Recalling Xiaofei Liu's article “No Fats, Femmes, or Asians”, the bear community is undoubtedly a lookist subculture. While it is alright to have preferences, many (sub)cultures confuse lookism and racism.

Patrick B. McGrady highlights the significance of being fat and gay in his article ““Grow the Beard, Wear the Costume”: Resisting Weight and Sexual Orientation Stigmas in the Bear

Subculture”. The Bear Community takes what rejected by others and transforms it into a positive and celebratory concept. More than half of the participants experienced some form of discrimination. Those who identified as fat and gay found comfort and empowerment in the Bear Community.

Peter Hennen’s ethnography *Faeries, Bears, and Leathermen* can be paralleled to “No Fats, No Fems, No Asians”, since it also focuses on three different subcultures that face various and at times double stigmatization as well. Having previously discussed the varying levels and use of masculinity that Hennen highlights when specifically referring to the subcultures of Faeries, Bears, and Leathermen, it could have perhaps been beneficial if I took a closer look at gender in the Bear Community. I did not include a question regarding masculinity and effeminacy in the survey for the interviews and the topic was not prominently discussed in the interviews.

Once again Jason Whitesel examines the importance of recognizing the double stigma of being fat and gay in his ethnography “Fat Gay Men: Girth, Mirth and the Politics of Stigma”. Whitesel argues that fat gay men strive for dignity, respect, and inclusion (sentiments which the participants also agree with).

5.2 Elaboration of Meaning (Interpretation Performance)

Having conducted the interviews, coded the transcriptions, and engaged in the literature, it is important to conduct research in order to understand the function of binaries in societies, how and why subcultures operate, how reappropriation and rejection of binaries/mainstream ideals leads more diversity, inclusion, and empowerment. Furthermore, when studying discrimination and marginalization, it is critical to read and analyze these factors from multiple perspectives and angles, as suggested by intersectionality (Crenshaw) and the matrix of oppression (Hills Collins), so that we obtain a holistic account of narrative/experience while allowing our perspective to shift and grow so that we are able to develop and contemplate previously unseen and uninterested thoughts, areas, and concepts.

5.3 Recommendations for Action

If I were to conduct further research or start the thesis over, I would maybe consider widening the reach of research subjects i.e., more racial diversity, age diversity, more geographic diversity, but this could perhaps become a dissertation in this regard). As previously mentioned, I did not put a lot of focus or emphasis on masculinity when conducting the interview. This could have perhaps offered yet more insightful results and discussions. Continue to conduct research on subcultures, minorities, groups who receive little attention, etc.

5.4 Limitations

While the results of the research proved to be insightful and favorable, there were a few limitations during the research, which need to be addressed. These limitations include technological limitation, linguistic limitation, gender, race, and age. In regard to technology, two of the interviews needed to be conducted to online because the participants live in the U.S. Although the interviews were recorded properly and the internet connection was smooth, it is not always possible to pick up one's mannerisms, gestures, and expressions on camera. While this is a minor limitation, in person interviews provide a more personable and accurate interview experience. In addition to technology, there was a mild linguistic limitation since English was a second language for many of the participants. While all the participants spoke fluent and adequate English, a couple of them expressed that a few topics were a bit harder for them to explain in English. This could also alter the intended linguistic and emotional meaning. When necessary, I offered to explain words or clarify concepts in German. While the participants were diverse in citizenship, experience, and offered varying insightful accounts, they were all cisgendered, white males. Focusing on a wider age group, as well as gender (Trans Bears and Grizzly Bears) and race (Black Bears and Panda Bears), could have proven beneficial in obtaining more diverse and insightful results. Nonetheless, the most challenging limitation was recruiting participants who were willing to donate their time for an interview.

5.5 Interpretation of Results

Apps

The results proved that both inclusions and exclusions occur within not only the bear community but all gay communities and subcultures. The apps make it both possible and more effortless to discriminate due to the layer of anonymity they provide. While sexual experiences are a part of

the app experience, they were not considered to be the most important motivating factor for app use amongst the participants. Most participants use apps daily, with a couple using them a few times a week. A notable difference was mentioned between bearish apps like Growlr when compared to other apps like Grindr and Scruff. It is harder for Bears to be bearish or find other Bears on non-bearish apps. While the apps did not play a role in the outing of any of the participants (perhaps the result that I personally find the most peculiar as this was not the case for me during my outing), one of the participants met his husband of 10 years on Growlr as well as found community by joining a gay rugby team due to initial contact on Growlr. Other participants expressed the joy they experience from the apps when they meet new bears and form strong bonds and friendships, to the point that they travel on holiday. Lastly, it was mentioned how the apps function as a bulletin board for bear events all over the world. This alludes to utopia and queer futurity as mentioned by Muñoz.

Body Politics

All of the participants mentioned the struggle they faced to reach happiness and satisfaction with their own bodies. While, for the most part, participants are happy with their bodies, they hesitated to say yes when asked in the interview. Although they are happy and content, there are still aspects that many of the participants would change if given the chance. Fetishization proved to be the most intricate result in terms of varying responses. Although it was agreed amongst the participants that consent was critical and key when experiencing fetish, the concept of fetish had a different meaning for each person. Ranging from positive, negative to neutral.

Over half of the participants experienced some form of discrimination, with fatness being the most common reason. One participant experienced racial discrimination, in that he was accused of Nazism, simply for being Austrian.

Bear Community

All participants except for one identified as either a Bear or a part of the bear Community. The participant, who identified as neither a Bear, nor a member of the Bear Community stated that he is a Bear-admirer. Those participants who are part of the Bear Community find solace in the utopia and inclusion that the community provides. Others admit that the Bear community itself can also be exclusionary. The general consensus amongst participants was that the LGBTQ

Community is exclusionary in general. Regarding bear language, it was seen as endearing, positive, expressive and empowering.

Community and Identity Online/Offline

In some cases the apps provided community, whereas others found community offline due to temporality, personal preference, or desire to be discreet. The apps did not prove to be a critical factor in time of outing/shaping identity. A balance of both online and offline experience appeared to be the most successful and preferred among the participants.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary of the work

To review, the research question examined in the thesis was: “How do gay dating apps facilitate inclusions and exclusions, within the bear community? Furthermore, what role do the apps play in shaping identity and subculture in the bear community?” This research question was analyzed through guided, semi-structured interviews. After recording 7 interviews, they were transcribed and coded according to Mayring’s Qualitative Content Analysis.

6.2 Answering the research questions

How do gay dating apps facilitate inclusions and exclusions, within the bear community?
Furthermore, what role do the apps play in shaping identity and subculture in the bear community?

Exclusions and inclusions occur within the bear community and both online and offline. Finding community is based on different factors: 1.) Age, even with web-based applications in the late 80s and early 90s, it was difficult to find community online and essential to meet people in bars or at event. 2.) Finding sense of community varies person to person. Some prefer only the apps, others prefer only to meet in person, some prefer a mix of both. Only one of the interviewees never uses apps. Exclusions occur within the bear community (both internally=> bear against bear, chaser against bear; and externally gay culture as dominant culture against bear culture as subculture [or more simply twink against bear]).

6.3 Outlook

Bear subculture absolutely captures Muñoz futurity and concept of the not yet here and conscious (cruising, bars, apps, community). The bear community adapts to the future when needed/ prompted to do so (bear bars, Growlr as its own bear app and apart from the dominant/binary app Grindr in the gay community). Bear runs, pride, etc. Halberstam's interpretation of Queer Subcultures and Temporalities reminds us that archiving is critical for understanding, studying, and pre-serving subculture. Halberstam highlights how subcultures are generally the underdog and are under studied and underrepresented when compared to a binary culture. Furthermore, Bears face the double marginalization of being fat and gay. While the Bear Community has some set rules and definitions, being a Bear is a state of mind as much as it is a specific look. While it rejects the gay cultural binary of skinny, muscular, clean-shaven bodies and the societal binary of compulsory heterosexuality (by virtue of being a gay sub-culture), the Bear Community takes what others disdain (hair, fat, and mass) and lauds it for its otherness. Despite the inner exclusions that can occur in the Bear Community, all in all, it provides utopia for gay men who are fat, hairy, and bearish, a spotlight for those who are excluded from and hidden, as well as sense of belonging and connection.

6.4 Summary of scientific article

Once again, the goal of the research was to analyze the bear community as a subculture through the lens of gay dating apps, while bearing in mind in-/exclusionary experiences on the apps, as well as (potential) facilitation of community via the apps. Furthermore, I analyzed the apps' relationship to identity as well as a supplementary aid for coming out. I also analyze what role (if any) the apps played at the time of coming out. While exclusion happens on the apps (for all (sub)cultures: gay, Twink, Bear, etc.), they can also offer a sense of Inclusion. Growlr, for example allows Bears to shine and find community, inclusion, and acceptance. It is important to research areas such as subculture and discrimination, to understand how our own personal experiences can coincide with or drastically vary from someone else's. I hope my thesis helps contribute to and expand those less- studied areas of scholarship such as Fat Feminism, Fat Studies, BDSM/Fetish Studies, and Queer Studies. Studying these intersections (both in personal experiences and areas of study) allow us to fill the gaps between mainstream culture and queer culture, while allowing us to broaden our horizons, personally, socially, and academically.

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Appendix:

Abstract:

Inspired to analyze the relationship between labels, (in)exclusions, and identity politics in gay culture, the aim of this thesis is to examine and analyze how gay dating apps facilitate inclusions and exclusions, within the bear community, while further investigating the role that the apps play in shaping identity and subculture in the bear community. Jack Halberstam's theory of Queer Temporalities and Subcultures, as well as José Esteban Muñoz's theory of Queer Futurity, are applied to better understand the bear community as a subculture and how it develops its identity, community, and existence, both spatially and over time via the apps. The applied methodological approach consists of seven guided interviews, which were transcribed and analyzed using Philipp Mayring's method of qualitative content analysis. The results were divided into three main themes: Body Identity, Culture, and Community, which show that identity consists partially of a pre-prescribed definition by the subculture as well as a personal definition. Community can occur online, offline, or both simultaneously, and is largely determined by age, temporality, culture, and motivation. While the use of apps seems to be essential in bear subculture, they allow for simultaneous inclusion and exclusion to occur. Lastly, the bear community provides a queer utopia for those who experience the double stigma of being "fat" and "gay".

Zusammenfassung:

Angeregt durch die Frage nach der Beziehung zwischen Labels, Ein/Ausschlüssen und Identitätspolitik in der schwulen Kultur, ist das Ziel dieser Arbeit zu untersuchen und zu analysieren, wie schwule Dating-Apps die Ein- und Ausschlüsse innerhalb der Bear-Community erleichtern, während gleichzeitig die Rolle untersucht wird, die diese Apps bei der Gestaltung von Identität und Subkultur in der Bear-Community spielen. Jack Halberstam's Theorie der Queer Temporalities and Subcultures sowie José Esteban Muñozs Theorie der Queer Futurity werden angewandt, um die Bear-Community als Subkultur besser zu verstehen und zu untersuchen, wie sie ihre Identität, Gemeinschaft und Kultur sowohl räumlich als auch zeitlich über die Apps entwickelt. Der angewandte methodische Ansatz bestand aus sieben Leitfadeninterviews, die mittels der qualitativen Inhaltsanalyse von Philipp Mayring transkribiert wurden. Die Ergebnisse ergaben, dass Identität zum Teil aus einer vorgegebenen Definition durch die Subkultur sowie einer persönlichen Definition besteht. Gemeinschaft kann online, offline oder an beiden Orten gleichzeitig stattfinden und wird weitgehend durch Alter, Zeit und Motivation bestimmt. Die Nutzung von Apps scheint in der Bearsubkultur von entscheidender Bedeutung zu sein, denn sie ermöglichen die gleichzeitige Einbeziehung und den Ausschluss.

After coding and analyzing the interviews, the data was organized into the following 10 categories and 27 subcategories:

RQ1-1: App Usage

-Use of specific apps

RQ1-2: App Usage

- How long (since when) and how often the apps are used

RQ1-3: App Usage

-Differences between apps

RQ1-4: App Usage

-Intentions when using apps

RQ1-5: App Usage

-Positive and negative experiences on the apps

RQ1-6: Body Politics

-Perception of different body types

RQ1-7: Body Politics

-Importance of physical appearance

RQ1-8: Body Politics

-Relationship with your own body

RQ1-9: Body Politics

-Experience with “not your type”

RQ1-10: Fetishization

- Personal experience and feelings toward being fetishized (personally and generally)

RQ1-11: Fetishization

-Fetishization of others' bodies

RQ1-12: Fetishization

-Perception of fetishization (positive, negative, or neutral)

RQ1-13: Discrimination and Exclusionary Experiences

- Discrimination Experienced on the Apps

RQ1-14: Discrimination and Exclusionary Experiences

- Exclusions in bear community as subculture

RQ1-15: Discrimination and Exclusionary Experiences

- Exclusions in LGBTIQ+ community as dominant culture

RQ1-16: Bear Community as Subculture

- Personal identification as a bear and since when

RQ1-17: Bear Community as Subculture

- Importance of being part of the bear community

RQ1-18: Bear Community as Subculture

- Language specific to bear community and perception of language

RQ1-19: Community Identity and On/Offline Experiences

- How community is found without the apps and/or during outing (offline)

RQ1-20: Community Identity and On/Offline Experience

- Use of apps to find community during outing (online)

RQ1-21: Community Identity and On/Offline Experiences

- Ways to find community offline in addition to the apps

RQ1-22: Community Identity and On/Offline Experiences

- Use of apps to shape/ mold identity (online)

RQ1-23: Community Identity and On/Offline Experiences

- Offline experiences that help shape identity

RQ1-24: Additional Subcultures

- New subculture mentioned

RQ1-25: Loss of Gay Offline Social Group

- Bear group disbanded due to lack of funds

RQ1-26: Intersection Between Subcultures

- How subcultures intersect and coexist

RQ1-27: Inclusions in Bear/LGBTIQ+ Community

- Positive experiences of Inclusions

The following chart highlights specific anchor examples of each of the ten categories in the text in the text

	Category Name	Category Definition	Anchor Example
Category 1	App Usage	General statements about which specific apps were used, duration of use, notable differences, and positive and negative experiences.	<p>And I started then to use Gay, Gay Romeo for example, in 2001 or 2002. And I, I met I met some guys from this with over this app, but I recognized that it's it's not my type how I met people are how can I meet people? I t's a very it's a very fast way to meet people and to have sex with with other people. But that is not my type. I prefer to know a person personally, or to don't know him at all. M6 03:26</p>
Category 2	Body Politics	Statements regarding perception of different body types as well as importance of physical appearance. Relationship with own body and experiences with different types also addressed.	<p>"Well, I mean, I think I have a broad range of people have physical types that I find attractive, but I would say physical appearance is important, partly because of health and taking care of yourself. Like I think of I think if I'm judging, I'm judging physical appearance more on is this person healthy and happy and secure. less worried about exactly how heavy they are or how tall they are or how attractive you know, whatever arguably attractive they are. But I am generally attracted to bigger guys and more muscley guys, and I'm fine with any degree of hairiness and, but you can sort of tell people who are comfortable in their own skin, and I think that is maybe the most comfortable. The most attractive trait." (B2 18:59)</p>
Category 3	Fetishization	Personal experience and opinion with fetish, being fetishized, as well as positive negative, neutral perception of fetish and fetishization of others' bodies.	<p>C1: 20:51 Personally, I think, I guess it really depends on how it's used. Because as long as they're, each party is okay with it- like consent. Kind of like, if, if they want to do it, and they're into it, then it's positive, because then it gets them to explore things that they may not have been able to experience or they haven't experienced for themselves, but they want to, I can see that. Maybe there are situations where it can be a negative thing. I guess, for me personally, as a pup, and then my husband coming in as a pup handler, I see that as very, it's different, because I don't want him my lifelong partner, to I, I don't want to imagine him as owning me. And it is just, it just doesn't feel right or loving. Just to me, I'm, I've can't speak for anybody else. But it just, it just feels awkward. And I and I really don't want him to, to do that. I can see other people wanting to do that. And I will allow, I would feel more comfortable for them, and allowing them to do that. But I know at the end of the day that I'm going back</p>

			home to my husband. And so so that's an instance where I can see it as negative for me, as Zayne playing a role that I would feel more comfortable him not doing because I just love him in a way that it doesn't. It doesn't fit the puzzle piece. It just doesn't feel good.
Category 4	Discrimination and Exclusion Experiences	Discrimination experiences on the apps as well as exclusions in the bear community and LGBTIQ+ community	G4: 25:06 Only as an Austrian once *laughs* for the weirdest reason. There was this guy who apparently was Jewish, and he was like on Growlr. And he said something like, I said something like a hope you enjoy your stay. And it's quite a nice city so get to know it, and stuff like that. He said that he, he thinks that this is like, like this, there's so this, there's many nice things in the city that's full of evil or something like this. I said, what kind of evil do you mean? He was talking about- He was apparently a Jewish guy from Israel, and he says, you know, all the Nazis and the history and whatsoever. I told him, this is like long gone, you know, this is an entirely different.... And he sort of said this, that I have to say this as an Austrian, because, you know, he even said something like, what is it, to be a Nazi comes with our blood or something. And it was incredibly racist as well, you know, especially since it didn't know anything about my family. Surely could have easily been- come from a family that was a victim of Nazism *definitely*. Yeah, but that's something probably as as an Austrian, but never as never as a chubby bear person. But that's probably because I just surround myself with what I like.
Category 5	Bear community as subculture	Personal identification of a bear and since when. Importance of being a member of community and knowledge/ perception of bear-specific language.	16:41 K7: I love the term-I love the term bear. I love the term chub. And I love- I use them for myself. I, I mean, let me ask here more analytically, insofar as these terms have had a tremendously empowering potential. They're not just potential reality to a lot of people. They're amazing. I mean, the fact that I mean, I'm not even talking about fat as a reappropriated term, which is also amazing, but a term like chub is, is, you know, when it first came into currency in the '80s, to basically re not just reappropriate. But re-imagine what is normal normatively speaking, a flaw i.e., fatness, and come up with a term that is intrinsically endearing and meant as, as something that is not just endearing, but sexually desirable, is an incredible act of communal empowerment. So I'm like, all for all of these terms.

Category 6	Community Identity and On/Offline Experiences	How community is found online and offline as well as at time of outing. The role in which apps play in helping shape identity, and how community and identity can be found offline without the apps.	40:33 C1: Yes. Because like I said, with my rugby experience without the one bear that I started talking to [on Growlr], he opened me up to himself, he opened him up, me up to the team. I found community that way. And then I also found other people just to go out and do things with.
Category 7	Additional Subcultures	Mentioning of new subculture	29:55 C1: So the dynamic between such as myself and a handler or is there, there's a, there's pup handlers who essentially handle and take care of their pups and observe them. So, for instance, there are times where we have puppy moshes where all the pups get together and we lay out mats on the ground at a bar or wherever we go. And the pups play, and the handlers just watch from afar. And then the handlers also just interact with each other and talk, it's, it's almost like we, we are essentially the dogs, and they are the humans who take their their dogs to the park.
Category 8	Loss of Gay Offline Social Group	A social group (offline) disbands and is no longer able to meet due to financial reasons.	And we lost- maybe Ron told you we lost our bear group. ... They just couldn't keep it going. And so in some ways, that is one of the main ways we are still connected, is on Growlr. Because most of them are- most of them are there. B2 14:35
Category 9	Intersection Between Subcultures	Mention and explanation of intersection between two or more subcultures.	52:56 B2: Well, maybe I'll say something about the intersection of bear and leather and kink. *sure* So um, you know, I think there is a fairly healthy mix of bear and leather and kink people. And, you know, here Cleveland has a big leather event. And I started going to that event because they used to have bear parties. And they'd have one night where they'd have a bear party. And so that was my little dipping my toe into what the leather community was like. And then as I kind of moved into my Daddy Bear phase, I kept getting asked to do lots more kink stuff, and being pursued by more chasers and boys *mhm*-subs. And I had to learn how to do some kink stuff. And so I like the fact that the leather community accepts bears being part of it, and that bears except people being kind of kinky. *mhm* Well, and that, that, that was a natural progression for m

Category 10	Inclusions in Bear/LGBTIQ+ Community	Discussion of positive inclusive experience in the bear community.	36:41 H3: I would try and really see it positively and say, it is a more inclusive, it is more inclusive than exclusive. But there after surely are instances where it shows that, that people just like, ignore you, basically, or just like really? Yeah, don't give you the feeling that you are worth the same, basically as other bearish types. So this this this is this is surely a thing. That's, that's, that's, that's true. But overall, I think it's a more it's a it's it's a welcoming, gentle, friendly, cuddly, atmosphere-ish community, I think much more than then basically other communities. I guess, I would probably guess, that other communities are even harsher. You know, it when it comes to, to like, inclusion and exclusion. I think the bear community is a bit- does better than other communities in that regard, I would say.
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Interview guideline

I will record the interview, transcribe it, and will delete the recording after the transcription of the interview. I will also use a pseudonym when referring to what you said in the research report. Please feel free to say pass if you are not comfortable answering a question.

Could you introduce yourself in a few words?

Overview of Gay Dating “Hook-up” Apps

In this section of the interview, I will ask some shorter questions. Later, I will ask questions that you are able to answer more openly:

*If you do not use the apps, please describe in detail how you experience gay culture, community, and experiences in your daily life.

- Please describe the role the apps play in your life:
 - Do you use any apps? If so, which ones do you use?
 - When did you first start using the apps?
 - Do you notice any major differences in the apps if you use more than one? If yes, please describe them.
 - How often do you use the apps?
 - What are your main intentions when using the apps (i.e. sexual experiences, friendship, dating, meeting new people in the community)?

Now we will begin the section where you can answer more freely:

- Describe your experiences and interactions on the apps
 - are they positive, negative, etc.
 - can you give an example?

Body Politics

- How do you perceive different body types and why (i.e. hairy, fat, slim, chubby, muscular, scruffy, etc.)?
- Is physical appearance important to you? If so, how/why?
 - Do you feel that your body is fetishized? How does that make you feel?
 - Have you ever fetishized someone else's body or appearance?
 - Do you think fetishization is positive, negative, neither, neutral?
- Have you ever experienced discrimination on the apps? If so, give an example.
- Briefly describe your relationship with your body.
- Have you ever had an experience or relationship with someone you consider to be “not your type”?

Bear Community

- Do you personally identify as a bear or consider yourself a bear? When did you start identifying as such?
- What does it mean to you to be a bear/ part of the bear community and why?
- Do you find the bear community to be exclusionary?
- Do you find the LGBTIQ+ community in general to be exclusionary?
- Do you know of any labels, language or phrases that are unique to the bear community?
 - Give a few specific examples?
 - How do you perceive this language?

Community, identity, and connections both online and offline

- If you did not use apps when you first came out/identified as gay, how do you meet other gay men/find a sense of community?
 - word of mouth, databank, reviews, advertisement, social media
- If you did use the apps when you first came out/ identified as gay to meet other gay men/ find a sense of community, what other ways can you imagine meeting other gay men?
- Did the apps help shape or mold your identity?
- If not, what did help shape or mold your identity (if anything?)
- Do you have anything else you would like to add before the interview ends?

This concludes our interview. Thank you very much for your time and participation!

Interview 1

Tue, Jul 25, 2023 9:59PM • 47:29

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

bear, apps, friends, guess, experience, community, feel, people, gay, handlers, pups, growler, hairier, find, dating apps, chaser, types, negative, opened, attracted

00:01

J1: So, hello, my name is Jeffrey Janus and I have joining us today.

00:09

C1: Chris, this is Christopher

00:11

J:1 Chris. Thank you very much. This is an interview for my master's thesis. And I thank you very much for your time and for joining. Absolutely, just as a disclaimer, and for your information, I will record the interview, transcribe it, and I will delete the recording after the transcription. I will also use a pseudonym when reviewing what you said in my research report. If there's something that makes you uncomfortable, feel free to say pass if you're not comfortable answering.

00:40

J1: That goes for the or that's the end of the disclaimer. Could I ask you to introduce yourself? In a few words, please?

00:47

C1: Sure. I'm Christopher. I go by Chris for short. I am currently I'm a nursing student. And I am also a certified surgical tech, trauma tech of several years. Good with the medical field. I love sports. I'm an athlete, have done swimming. Any other recreational sports imaginable. Let's see, I love kids. I love being around them. I love all the dumb things they do. I love the dumb things that they make me. And so let's see. I think that's a good a good snippet of me. I'm married. I have my husband. And we've been together for 10 years now. And yeah, that's I think that's me.

01:38

J1: Very good. Thank you very much. So the first there's a couple different sections of the interview, the first part is going to look largely at gay dating apps hookup apps, so to speak. I'll ask some shorter questions. And then later on, there'll be a bit longer questions. More for free response where you can answer more openly. If you do not use apps, could you describe in detail your experience in gay culture, your experience with gay community and just daily experiences? If you use the apps, how do those work? If not, then how do you find those? Three mediums?

02:19

C1: Okay. So I was introduced to gay dating apps, actually, as it turns out 10 years ago, and that's how I met my husband. I first started using Oh, let me let me do this story. So I was working as a lifeguard and swim instructor. And a coworker of mine asked if I went to the gym with him. So we did, we went to the gym. And afterwards, we went for dinner, and he brought along his girlfriend, his girlfriend asked me if I had anybody special in my life. I said, No. And then she said, Well, you should try Grindr. And I'm like, Okay, sure. And so I did. And I didn't find anybody of interest. For me. Personally, I just didn't see anybody that I found attractive, because it was just the the types of people that I found on Grindr. And so just for the heck of it, I looked up on my app store in the search bar, I, I typed in muscle bear. And then I found I found the app called Growlr. And so that was more of my kind of app because it had bigger, hairier, muscley dudes on there. And so that's, that's what I'm attracted to. And so that's how I found Zayne. And we've been together ever since 2013. That was my experience with Growlr. I still have it, but I don't use it as often. I use Scruff instead.

03:55

C1: It's just more user friendly. We both find Zayne also uses it, we share the app,

04:03

C1: We share the account. And so we find that there are fellows out there that we are both attracted to. And it's it's just a lot easier to use than most other apps, I think. And so we just use that from time to time just to meet up with guys just to be friends. See their interests. So for example, I used Growlr previously for getting to know this rugby player, and he introduced me into his rugby team. And so I played rugby with his his gay league for two seasons, and it was fantastic. And I met all the other gay guys on the team that way. And so that was a very positive outlook from Growlr itself, or just any gay dating. Yeah. Just finding out what people are interested in and And then just joining in to their community that way. But yeah, so we use it for friendships, I use it for gaming as well. So I'm a big gaymer video games. And I get to share my gaming experiences with other gaming. Gay gentlemen, as well. And so sometimes it allows us to play together from online, across the ocean, the Atlantic, I play with these Norwegian friends of mine that stream their games. And then also, it gets me in contact with my friends back home in California, as well. So being here in Ohio, for just nursing school. The separation, it keeps us it keeps me together, and it keeps me up to date with my friends back home and elsewhere. And then from time to time, we do use the app to, to hook up. And so then we make connections that way, and they become good friends. And that's, that's my experiences with both growler and scruff. I have also had experience with- oh God, Pupspace- Pupspace is an app for I guess, pups such as myself and have handlers, just to communicate and share their likes and be part of the community to find places to actually be pups and pup handlers together. So that's another app that I've used. And I think, I can't think of anything else right now. But that's typically what I've been using those apps for.

06:58

J1: Very good. I think you answered all the bullet points without trying. That was excellent! Just as a quick recap for myself, so you said 10 years ago, you started,

excuse me, using the apps and prefer- use Scruff more often but prefer both Growlr and Scruff to Grindr, for example. Correct. *Yeah*. If that was that's safe to say. And I know you said there's they're a bit more user friendly. * Right? *Are there any other differences you notice, like, in the people or the interactions?

07:38

C1: The people, yes. And that's, it's probably just because of the assumptions of, I guess, people that want to use an app such as that. And they figure that Oh, Growlr is primarily for bears and mus muscle bears. And so I guess it's luck of the draw, really, because most of the time, I see non-bears on there. And it's for Zayne, and I, that's not something that we look into. And so that's why we've moved to Scruff. And we actually have the Pro account on Scruff too. So we went ahead and purchased that I forget how much setup, it was a month, but it's not that much at all, like \$10, or something like that, or 15. And so we really liked the app so much that we were able to get that and so it expands our radius as to how many other prospective friends that we can see. It also allows us to, I guess, make favorite folders and just there's there's a lot bunch more features with it that way. But yeah, Scruff was impressive enough that we actually bought the program.

08:59

J1: Very good. If I may ask, could you describe maybe a little bit your experience share the app as a couple is that difficult for you? Is that easy is

09:12

C1: so in our in our experience? Right. And so previously, it, it took us a while to actually start using the apps again, because when we found each other, we decided not to use the apps at all, because we didn't really need an extra person in our life or finding other friends. We wanted time for us. But as as the years together went on, we decided together that going ahead and opening up an account where we both share it and we both see what we each other sees it. It worked out there was some jealousy at times which is understandable And so Zayne and I are somewhat opposites, because I like bears. I like hair. He likes the smaller guys and the hairless guys. And we've come to find that it's, it was just too difficult to decide and agree on somebody that we would like to hook up with. And so we just kept it off as friends only, and nothing sexual of that nature. And so that was- that went well. And then that's when we decided to go ahead and open it up to possible sexual partners. And so we decided on expanding each of our horizons. So I gave Zayne a little bit of leeway. He gave me leeway, just to make it easier to find compatibility and others to play with or just even be around. Zayne is pretty heavy on the jealousy. And I've gotten to a point where there's no reason to be jealous anymore, honestly. And so we have a system on scruff where he hits the I'm interested button, or I'm not interested button on profiles. So I know that he's seen them. And if I like somebody, I favorite them. And then he sees that, and then he looks at them. And then he decides whether Oh, I like him too. Or no, I don't like him. And then we move on from there. And so our system that way has worked out pretty well. But yeah, as as we get older, we noticed that things become a lot easier in that aspects, just making friends and sexual partners.

11:58

J1: Thank you very much. Before moving to the next section, which I kind of called body politics. Okay, is there maybe a specific, any all experience that was particularly positive or particularly negative that you had on the apps that was influential or memorable? If not, it's okay.

12:22

C1: Let me let me think for a second

12:34

C1: No, I'm not I don't think I can think of one there are any negatives? No, no, no negatives.

12:42

J1: They're really refreshing to hear!

12:45

C1: Right. And so there's, there's positive experiences, but there's, I wouldn't say that there was anything that stood out the most. It's just, we're very thankful for making friends. That way. It helps Zayne come out of his shell because he likes being to himself most of the time, and we end up being homebodies which is fine with me. I like being at the house and change things together. And so it, it gives him the social skills to want to go out more. And so that's, that helps me and him so that's, that's a huge benefit that I've noticed. It makes him more personable to other people.

13:36

J1: Excellent. Thank you. So the next several questions will kind of focus on body and appearance, so to speak. And I'll open with how do you yourself perceive different body types and why so for example, if you hear the terms hairy, fat, slim, chubby, muscular, scruffy? You don't have to answer all those but just what comes to mind?

14:05

C1: Right, okay so I guess for me when for example, when you said hairy, I just instantly started like drooling.

14:12

J1: That makes two of us if I'm allowed to say that!

14:15

C1: Right. And so when I hear when I hear words like hairy or or muscley or big that just makes my my mind racing my gears turn. So I like those because I'm I'm attracted to bears who are hairy who are bigger than me, either muscular wise or just thicker in body composition. I just like that. It feels comforting. I feel protected. I feel I feel hot. So that's what gets me going. Let's see what else What was the other parts of the question?

15:05

J1: Just how do you perceive different body types? So I mean, I think it was that also and just if a body's Is it hairy but fat or slim or choppy or muscular, scruffy? I think you hit the nail on the head. So you okay, you like a lot of different things? And yeah, I mean, I don't want to take words out of your mouth but...

15:25

C1: And, and like I said, working with Zayne and expanding our horizons, I've started to like, more things and be more open to His like so we can find more compatibility. So may not be necessarily hairier, muscley or thicker. It could be guys that are kind of like me, I'm less, I'm more hairless. I am slimmer. And yeah, so just opening the doors so that both of us can be happy.

15:57

J1: So kind of you like what you like, but it's in some aspect, but then also you're willing to try new things and have new experiences. *Right* Super. Would you say that physical appearance is important to you? If so, why or why not?

16:15

C1: Physical appearance is absolutely important to me, it's actually the first thing that I look for in a guy, okay. So for example, my, my eyes are drawn to beards. And just hair on legs or arms, how muscular they are, and how much bigger they are compared to me. So I would say physique is important. But it's not everything. It's not an all short. And so from there, it just opens the door for me where it, it makes me want to approach them and get to know them a little bit more. And so that's when their personality comes in. And if I liked her personality, then that just makes me want to be around them more. If they like to play games, if they're athletic, or if there have any common interests that we each have, then it just makes me want to be around them more and even more attractive in that in that aspect. So physical appearance is important. Yes.

17:24

J1: Very good. In that same kind of category of appearance. For you yourself. Do you feel that your body is fetishized or has been fetishized? And if so, how do you feel about that?

17:40

C1: I feel that for me when others say that, Oh, you're you're cute. You're beautiful. You're handsome. I do like it. I'm it's flattering. And then there's sometimes where I just don't feel the way that they think. But maybe that's just because of my own image of my body. I think I like my body. I do. I just I guess we're attracted to the things that we don't have. So I wish I was hairier I wish I was bigger. But I when you when you use the phrase fetishize you, I, I kind of like that. And so, I do I do, and I liked the attention. And I like the things that guys imagined and that that grinds their own gears and the use of their imagination, because then my imagination starts going and then we dive into like an almost a role-playing kind of thing. And just fantasizing and just imagining what could arise from what is being said. And so that just makes it even hotter. And it just makes

me want to do stuff more. So, nothing -I don't see anything negative coming from fetish-fetishizing me, or the things that people say about me, because it just feels nice.

19:24

J1: Very well. On the flip side, have you ever fetishized someone else's body or appearance?

19:30

C1: Oh, absolutely. Yes, I have. And so I guess an example would be if someone were to tell me that they're very submissive or very sub-y, I've never really I've never really been comfortable taking on the role of being very dominant because I like being submissive myself. But if there's somebody That's really into it and wants me to dominate them. I will. And so just changing roles makes it exciting for me, and just pushing each other's limits as to what they can do what I can do, and then finding out even new boundaries and limits that we can actually reach. It's very hot. So, yes, I have fetishized other people. Yes.

20:35

J1: Last question for the kind of a theme of fet- as a fetishization if I can talk. Do you find fetishization to be positive? Negative? Neutral? Neither? What are your thoughts on the concept of it?

20:51

C1: Personally, I think, I guess it really depends on how it's used. Because as long as they're, each party is okay with it- like consent. Kind of like, if, if they want to do it, and they're into it, then it's positive, because then it gets them to explore things that they may not have been able to experience or they haven't experienced for themselves, but they want to, I can see that. Maybe there are situations where it can be a negative thing. I guess, for me personally, as a pup, and then my husband coming in as a pup handler, I see that as very, it's different, because I don't want him my lifelong partner, to I, I don't want to imagine him as owning me. And it is just, it just doesn't feel right or loving. Just to me, I'm, I've can't speak for anybody else. But it just, it just feels awkward. And I and I really don't want him to, to do that. I can see other people wanting to do that. And I will allow, I would feel more comfortable for them, and allowing them to do that. But I know at the end of the day that I'm going back home to my husband. And so so that's an instance where I can see it as negative for me, as Zayne playing a role that I would feel more comfortable him not doing because I just love him in a way that it doesn't. It doesn't fit the puzzle piece. It just doesn't feel good.

22:47

J1: Thank you. Have you ever? Have you ever experienced any type of discrimination on the apps? Would you say?

22:59

C1: I, I'm not sure if I have felt that myself. But I have seen it's it's pretty apparent. You can look on Instagram or Facebook of other people's experiences of discrimination for

sure. And they screenshot it and they show their friends how- how awful people can be to somebody's body. And thing very negative things about their appearance, or why why are you even on here? If you're if you don't want to hook up? Or why are you even showing those types of pictures for everyone to see. It's disgusting. And that kind of behavior is that's that's just not acceptable. And I can't even imagine the types of people that would want to do that. And why? Because what's what's the point in bringing someone down, if you're trying to look for somebody on a dating app, to spend time with, like, if you don't like somebody, move on, go go to somebody else, don't bring them down. So that's my take on it. But I haven't personally felt that, but I have definitely seen other friends feel that in sometimes people actually go as far as stealing other people's images, their pictures of them, and putting them onto their own profile, essentially catfishing other people, other guys into believing that, oh, this is this is me. And let's go out. You're not going to meet somebody and and say, Oh God, this is not who that who this person said he was. And so people go to the extremes as to even that. And so those are the types of negative experiences I've seen with that.

24:57

J1: It's kind of ironic in a sense, I mean, to varying degrees, it's you know, queer people, gay men, we're from a, we're already sys like systematically repressed. So, the fact that we do that to other people, it's like, why? What is what reason for- makes me a little crazy, but that's what I'm trying to find out. So I know you mentioned earlier that you said you had a pretty okay pretty decent relationship with your body. That would be the next question. Do you have anything that add to that? Or is there anything else you would describe or

25:33

C1: anything that I would change about my body? *No, sorry*

25:35

J1: No, no, no Sorry. Just the way you're describing your relationship with your body. I know earlier, you said you were pretty content. I just meant do you have anything to? *Oh, um* to add to the descriptor to add to the relationship you have with your body?

25:49

C1: Got it. No, I think I am. I am happy with my body. I just wish I just wish I was hairier and bigger. But I can't and that's okay.

25:59

J1: You're happy. But I think that's all of us, for sure.

26:03

C1: Right? My genetics do not allow.

26:06

J1: I feel your pain. I have a little tiny spot on my chest and wish there was more I wish I was a teddy bear. Well, a fuzzy teddy bear. But anyway, that's out of the script. I

apologize! Have you ever had an experience? Or a relationship with someone that you would consider to not be your type?

26:29

C1: YY-Yes. Not not long-term relationships, but just like instances of hooking up because most times in our experiences, you meet someone you like their pictures, but then they actually don't turn out to be kind of exactly what their pictures are? Sure, I guess. Maybe it's the angle. Maybe it's the lighting. We, we still do it anyways. Because we're there. Sometimes we don't. And sometimes we just chill out. Do I regret it? No. But in those instances, yes. There have been times where it's like, I'm not attracted to but since we're here might as well or let's just hang out.

27:17

J1: Very good. The next set of questions, we're a little over halfway done, pertaining to the bear community, and the queer community kind of in general. And if there's any additional labels or anything that pertain to you feel free to, to add, but do you personally identify as a bear? Consider yourself a bear? Or what maybe labels or terms would you use to describe yourself? And when did you start using such to identify?

27:52

C1: Um, I don't identify as a bear. I'm, I'm too I'm too small. In my opinion. I have I have been called young cub or cub by other people. Do I agree with them? Yes and no. Because I just I just don't feel like I'm actually there. The only the only labels that I could think of that I would have been called or would call myself. Peop-. People call me a chaser which I'm fine with because chasers chase bears and I like doing that. And I guess the term twink as well, I don't really like that term, it just doesn't sound very positive. But maybe to other people does. But twink doesn't doesn't sound very appealing. But definitely I identify as a club. I think it's, it's fun, I can put on my pup hood. And I can be someone else. And I, I noticed that when I do put my pup hood on his name is Max. So I become Max when I'm in my hood. I'm very, very lively, very animated. I'm very happy. And I just want to be very social butterfly for everybody. And it's just a lot of fun being someone else that you're not.

29:21

J1: for sure. *Sure* If I may ask a little bit more about Max, would you consider no use the terms pup and pup handler? So maybe if I can have you go into a bit of detail on how those are what how they function or how you describe them first, and then maybe would you consider pups part of the bear community or fetish or BDSM? Or does it kind of like overlap a lot of things. So I asked you a lot so if you need me to repeat anything, let me know I apologize. *Sure*

29:55

C1: So the dynamic between such as myself and a handler or is there, there's a, there's pup handlers who essentially handle and take care of their pups and observe them. So, for instance, there are times where we have puppy moshes where all the pups get together and we lay out matts on the ground at a bar or wherever we go. And the pups

play and the handlers just watch from afar. And then the handlers also just interact with each other and talk, it's, it's almost like we, we are essentially the dogs, and they are the humans who take their their dogs to the park. And so we follow their commands. And we just have a good time. And so that's what I my experience with pups and pup handlers. There are other dynamics that I've heard, where handlers are more into, I guess, the very dominating part of the role. And then the pups are the submissive part of the role. And so then that just intertwines with their sex life. And then sometimes it even goes as far as to actual life where they act as a pub all day. And the pub handlers are handlers all day. Even if they're not together, where they're separated by work, or they go to their workplace of work. And I guess there's an agreement to just remain in those roles all day. And let's see, what else in the bear community? Could you Could you repeat that, Jeff?

31:57

J1: is- would you consider pup and pup handlers? Would that be like part of the bear community? Or is it it sounds like it's kind of its own community or subculture, so to speak.

32:07

C1: Right. I don't think is a direct group within their community, but it most certainly can be, for sure.

32:19

J1: It sounds very, very cool. I know a little, very little bit about it. But it sounds like there's kind of, I don't want to say something for everybody. But like, there's varying degrees of it. So it's if it's, you know, like you said, it's putting on a persona, like you would put on like a drag persona. And I'm Max for the night, which I think is super, super cool. But then some people it's part of the relationship, or it can be, I don't want to mean to say extreme, like, in a negative way, but the it can be like their entire relationship and what works for them works for them. My kind of life philosophy is if it's not hurting yourself, or other people, as long as there's a safe word, then go for it. So..

33:00

J1: So I've kind of tied two questions together. But um, if it's since you said, you don't mind being called a chaser so much- as a chaser, would you consider yourself to be part of the bear community? And if so, what does it mean to be a part of that community to you?

33:17

C1: So being being a chaser that I, in my opinion, yes, I, that makes me want to be part of the bear community, and it is part of the bear community. And so, in that light, the dynamic and the relationship between a bear and a chaser, it's, it's just there. And then, for example, there are other bear events that happen in various locations of- in the States or even across continents, where they have, they hold different events and even cruises for bears and chasers just to be together. interact with each other. And that's yeah.

34:04

J1: Very good. Do you find you find the bear community to be exclusionary or even more broadly, maybe just the LGBTQI2+ community to be exclusionary as well. So I mean, if you want to tie those two together focus on one that much which

34:26

C1: so So thankfully, not all parts of the bear community are exclusionary there. There are definitely cliques within the bear community where bears just interact with each other and no one else then. It's sad sometimes where they just don't give other people the time of the day or just a chance just to even speak to one another. It's it can be very cliquish, unfortunately. And so at Most times, they don't care that that's the way it is. And just being being away from those types of people, it just makes everybody else happier. So just if they want to be that way, then let them be that way. Just there are others, other bears that would absolutely enjoy your company. So, yes, there is exclusion in the bear community.

35:26

J1: Are there any last kind of questions specifically to the bear community? And then I'll ask about

just community in general as well as identity. But in closing with the with bears? Do you know of any specific labels, languages, phrases that are unique to the bear community? That you can give examples of anything at all?

35:52

C1: Sure. Well, so bears is just a typical label for somebody who is who may be either bigger, hairier, or it may be it could just be their personality is very bearish and very cuddly and very loving. Their, their humor is there. They're very funny, sometimes. But that's what makes up a bear. In my opinion, it's just they're, they're very welcoming. They're bigger, they're hairier, and cuddly. And so that's a bear. And then, as I understand it, polar bears are just older, older bears. So maybe it could be the color of their hair is white, because polar bears are white. And, or it's just their age. Panda bears are bears who are of Asiatic descent, ethnicity-wise. And then black bears are bears who are are African American. As I understand it, we're here Oh, cubs are when I hear cubs, I think of younger bears or, or people who are, are bound to become bears. And I love that the younger guys who are I can see that they're, they're little. But growing up, they're going to definitely be bears. So those are the Cubs. What else? Is there any other labels that I can think of?

37:33

C1: There has to be more, but those are the ones I can think of.

37:36

J1: Oh, that's, that's perfect. What comes to mind first is was important for sure. Kind of I shared the same mindset of a club. I'm glad you said that.

37:45

J1: I think it can be different for other people for sure to just, for example, I have a couple Austrian friends that are partners that I think about 12/15 years and they're in their 40s. And he has on his Growlr "cub" I'm like, I'm pretty sure that makes you daddy. But if you want to be a cub, that's okay. So you know. Yeah. So, you know, it's and I also, when you said that, you know, there's the bear personality. So it's definitely the physicality is part of it. But there are other aspects that aren't just the physical aspects of the person that makes the bear.

38:20

C1: If you're, if you're in the right headspace, you could be a bear too. So it doesn't have to be physical, it's the mentality for sure,

38:26

J1: for sure. On the last stretch, so ask about community identity, and then kind of offline and online connections, both via the apps and not so the first question, if you did not use the apps when you first came out or identified as gay, what are How did you meet other gay men? And or how did you meet others? And then how did you find this sense of community?

38:54

C1: So without without the use of apps, or any of the apps, I would say that going out to setting such as a bar, or to purposely going to a community that is known, known to be gay, or LGBTQ+, I would go there just to go people seeing and have a drink, maybe. And then that's, that's just how my experience has been going to my favorite gay bars and just hanging out with my gay friends, and then meeting other new gay friends that they might have. And then just introducing us that way. Oh, Chris likes playing games, so do you or Chris likes going swimming? You like rock climbing too, or stuff like that. And so it just becomes a lot easier when you just expose yourself to that environment. And take take that leap. It was A little bit scary for me to do on my own at first. But I'm very glad that I did. Because that's how I've been making friends that way. And my lifelong friends, best friends. Thank you

40:23

J1: Um- Sorry. Do you Did you also find? Or do you think it's okay to say that you found you find a sense of community via the apps as well?

40:33

C1: Yes. Because like I said, with my rugby experience without the one bear that I started talking to, he opened me up to himself, he opened him up, me up to the team. I found community that way. And then I also found other people just to go out and do things with. *Absolutely*

41:00

J1: Would you say that the apps helped shape or mold your identity?

41:07

C1: I would, I would say so. Yes. Because the types of people that I talked to just opened, they opened my mind to different things. And then I can say, Oh, I kind of like that, or no, I'm not really into that. And so it unlocks the ability to find my, my deeper desires myself. And desires that I would never have thought that I actually like. So yes, I can say that other people on the apps helped me find things that I just that are mystery even to me.

41:44

J1: Very good. Second, last question. We're towards the homestretch. Is there anything offline, you would say that maybe not geared towards the apps that helped shape your identity? Or gave you a sense of community? I know, you mentioned probably a couple times and

42:00

C1: right, um, I would say, even just like looking up things on my own, and just researching certain aspects of just sex in general, I guess. And yeah, that would be offline for me. And just without the use of the apps, just my own type of research, and then again, just spending time with my buds outside.

42:35

J1: Very good. Is there anything else you would like to add? Or do you have any questions for me before the interview ends?

42:45

C1: Let's see. Oh, I guess, what made you think of doing this topic for your thesis?

42:55

J1: Very good question. Thank you. Um, so I was kind of first inspired by the not discrimination, but discrimination. So I'm sure you've unfortunately seen the whole no fats, no, fems, no Asians tagline. So I thought, you know why, exactly like we talked about earlier? Like, why do we do this? Why are we doing this to each other, there's actually people that are out there. And there was literature on it. So that was kind of kind of the inspiration for this. And we talk about Intersectionality all the time in Gender Studies. So I don't know if you know, the term but an African-American called, How do you say that in English, I can only think of the German word that's a wonderful problem to have in Europe. Kind of a lawyer, so to speak. She kind of coined this term intersectionality in originally made it through the lens of African American women. So discrimination hits them at different intersections. So not only are they a woman, but they're a black woman. And then if you're a black woman that's lesbian, or if you're a black, lesbian woman, that's poor or not educated or disabled. Just very different intersection. So, you can kind of definitely apply that through queer theory to queerness. So I was interested in that, that's gonna definitely take the, the analyzing part of my

work. But yeah, just kind of why do we do this to each other? And then I think you know, subcultures kind of the idea of like a community within a community. So like, almost all of my gay friends have, you know, horrible experiences on Grindr, and Growlr and Scruff, we're just like a completely different world. So I think that's just, it's super interesting. We're all here, but we're still all not here and on different, like we all fall fall under the rainbow, but we're also still, you know, on different planets, if you'll click sometimes so.

44:51

C1: Right. I feel like the apps just make it more convenient. But in all honesty, if I were to want to look for somebody In just near me I would I would want rather go out and make it more personable. Than I'm gonna I'm gonna hide behind my phone and just do this when I can just actually go out to the gay community and and be myself and see other people's as they are>

45:20

J1: for sure for sure it's easy to scroll and find eye candy I mean there's pros and cons to both but there's you know there's nothing wrong with that but it's also good to go out to the bar and have a drink and need someone and you you never know and I guess also a small thing I'll share so I still kind of relatively a gayby so I came out in 2019-My second year teaching second year in Austria so good experience I kind of find my found myself here I knew for a long time but just was able to you know, put it to words in readiness and emotion had no idea about the bear community so I had a kind of older daddy friend/mentor kind of take me under the wing and introduced me to the community. So super, super lucky. In that regard, I'm like, wait, this exists. There's people like me I don't have to look like the guy on the Abercrombie bag. Why this is a real life. So not that there's anything wrong with that. But you know, I've struggled a bit with body image my whole life. So it's been a I don't want to say love hate relationship, but grown to growing into love myself. So it's been a good experience. But that's my crazy story.

46:28

C1: Yeah, I just I just wanted to see what your take was on your thesis. And then I also wanted to say yeah, I hiding behind our phones and using apps is is fine, I guess but going out on our own is probably for the better.

46:43

J1: For sure. And I think a lot of guys and queer people our age. That's that's all we know. Unfortunately, it's and it's I mean, the pandemic definitely didn't help anything so we I think the average person who touches Oh, I met so and so online or oh I did this day there's community online, but it's it's just it's almost rare nowadays to hear that. Oh, I met this person at a bar. We're really good friends or you know, I met this person we hooked up and we still keep in touch at a bar so but I'll, if there's nothing else to add. I'll stop the recording button. Is that good. Thank you very much for your time. Greatly appreciate it.

47:24

C1: You're welcome. Thank you for having me.

47:28

J1: Gladly

Interview 2

Tue, Jul 25, 2023 9:49PM • 59:52

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, bear, apps, bears, good, community, recon, growler, scruff, guess, chasers, find, bar, leather, gay, kink, europe, weird, chat, comfortable

00:01

J2: And we're on. So thank you very much for joining us. I'm Jeffrey Janus, we're doing an interview for my master's thesis. I will record the interview, transcribe it, and we'll delete the recording after the transcription of the interview. I will also use a pseudonym, when reviewing what you'd said in the transcript, please feel free to say pass if a question makes you uncomfortable, or you don't want to answer it, as a brief introduction, may I ask you to introduce yourself and a few words where you're from name age of the like.

00:38

B2: Sure, my name is Brad. I'm from upstate New York originally, but I'm in Northeast Ohio Now. I'm 59. And single gay guy. I've taught my whole life. So about one third public school and about two thirds college. So that does have a little bit of bearing on this topic, because I've been a little bit more discreet than some people wouldn't be on hookup apps. But you know, I, I did, I did a master's immediately after my undergrad, and then started teaching in '87. And I really been in the academic either K12, or higher ed. doing the whole the whole time since then.

01:34

J2: Very good. Thank you. I teach English as well. So education is a it's a valuable field to be in, I think. In the first section, there'll be some shorter questions. And then the second kind of third parts sections will be a bit more open for free response. So I think you mentioned you used apps, so I don't need to ask if you don't use the apps. But um

02:01

J2: could you describe maybe in detail your experience of gay culture, community, and experiences in your daily life via the apps?

02:16

B2: Sure, so this caused me to like, go back and think, and I don't, I don't think I can remember exactly the evolution of everything. So like, when home- when home internet became a thing. So I guess that was early 90s. I think then hooking up was chat rooms. Like AOL rooms or Yahoo rooms. Like, I guess that was the forerunner of these of these hookup apps, because it wasn't mobile yet. But there were like these, these chat rooms, where you could kind of arrange hookups if you got a chat room. That was a local, a local thing. And so then I guess I was a little bit slow in adopting cell phones. So but

then I suppose when the apps came along, I think I think I was on apps on my computer. That became mobile apps. Right?

03:47

J2: Yeah. Well, that for sure. That would make sense.

03:49

B2: So I think I was trying to go back and think of what those were. So I think there was Bear 411. And I think there was something called Silver Daddies.

04:03

B2: I think that might still be out.

04:07

B2: Yeah, but I, I got rid of both of those. I remember Bear 411 being really hard to get rid of. And they just would not let you get- get rid of it. But they did not make a very good leap into the mobile venue. And so it just wasn't very effective. But also it just got weird. And they were doing weird things with people. And so so I got rid of both of those. And then the successors to those were Growlr. ...and trying to think if there was another daddy app, but I don't think so. So really, what I use now is Growlr and Recon. Now in the middle somewhere I have been on Scruff a couple of times I've never been on Grindr. I think there was something else. And it's escaping me. But now I'm on Growlr and Recon primarily, but also Nasty Kink Pigs. And Sniffies. Do you have a thing called Sniffies in Europe?

05:33

J2: I don't believe so.

05:36

B2: So it's a weird combo app of- it's, it's a mapping program, and everybody who's active shows up on a map, and shows up at a certain amount of distance from you. *Mhm* And you can message anybody that you can get to. Um Sniffies, S-N-I-F-F-I-E-S- not necessarily gay but seems to be all gay. But in terms of community, like feeling a sense of community, definitely Growlr and Recon are the ones that feel like a sense of community to me. And those are the ones that I use, you know, a fair amount.

06:18

J2: Is Recon. American. I don't believe I've heard of that one, either.

06:22

B2: Oh, no, it's biggest in Europe. *ohhhh!* I think it's entered in England. Actually, it's a kink- it's really a kink leather/ BDSM Community. But yeah, it's it's I'm pretty sure it's based out of London. But it's really, it's really the prevalent kink/BDSM international site/ app. And it doesn't work quite as well as Growlr. But it does, it does work pretty well, it does the same basic kind of things. You can search for people, you can have travel settings, you can- Unlike growler, at least, I've never tried to do Growlr on my computer.

I only have it as a mobile app. *same* But recon has a very good like computer site-based app, as well as a mobile app. And there's like, for instance, the ex-rated pictures are locked on your phone, but they're unlocked on your computer. *Oh, interesting* I don't really know what the point of that is. Yeah,

07:35

J2: it's kind of redundant.

07:36

B2: Yeah, but it must be something with the licensing and with the international nature of it. But yeah, recon is big in Europe. And, you know, of course, there's always leather competitions and parties. And, and so, you know, like all the Sitges stuff and the London stuff and all the circuit parties in Europe. Those are all announced down there. And there's a ton of people from, especially from Europe, but also from Asia, South America. But anyhow, Growlr and Recon are really the main things I'm on.

08:13

J2: Very good! I'll definitely check out Recon because I'm always into learning new things and exploring everything. So you mentioned Growlr and Recon, when would you say that you first started using those apps? Roughly?

08:30

B2: Oh, gosh, I mean [long pause]

08:37

B2: it feels like I've been on Growlr 15 years and Recon probably 10 years. *Okay*, pretty soon, pretty soon after that. I'm thinking about like, my where I've lived *mhm* when I was in Philadelphia? I don't think so. Think I was still on Bear 411 and Silver Daddies. And then Atlanta? I don't think so. But then I think once I moved back up to the Midwest, so I think, you know, 2004/5/6, something like that.

09:14

J2: Very good. Thank you. Do you would you say you notice any major differences between any of the apps that you mentioned? Or would they be pretty similar or?

09:26

B2: I mean, well, I'll be honest, I'm not on Grindr or Scruff, because there's so much bias against older people and heavy people.

09:33

J2: Yeah, absolutely, unfortunately.

09:37

B2: And you can just only take that kind of that kind of negative feedback so often. And so like, once in a while, when I travel, I might download Scruff, just for, you know, a day or two just because there's a bigger selection of people. But um so I have I have

popped onto scruff a few times. And of course, if I'm hanging out with a friend, I might be looking at their Grindr or their Scruff, you know. So you see what people are saying at other people. And it just seems so skewed towards younger, thinner people, *for sure*. And I figured that people who want bigger and older people know to gravitate towards a different kind of site. And why bother fighting against that? Because I don't really necessarily need a twink. So why? Why force myself to be on Scruff, and listen to criticism? So- *sure* Yeah, so that's, that's why I stick with these two. And these two have worked out great for me.

10:48

J2: I very much agree with with Grindr, it's, I have it I'll just look from time to time, but I don't use it to the same multitude as Growlr. And it's just very, not bear friendly, in my opinion. So I get that completely.

11:01

B2: And, and I don't really lie on my profiles. I mean, I do think that some bigger and older people like I can get away with saying that I'm younger than I am. But I just that, that just doesn't seem to be a good way to go. So I have never created fake profiles like that. And so I think that if I was on Scruff or Grindr, it would force me to create a kind of, like, not not accurate profile. And I've just been pretty comfortable with who I am. So I put my age I put my weight, I put my dick size, everything's pretty accurate. And so I think your people should know, I would much rather have somebody appear and say, Oh, you look better than your picture, or you look better than your profile than the other way around. *For sure. For sure*.

12:01

J2: How often would you say, roughly, you use the apps?

12:06

B2: Well, of course, now I have a whole bunch of friends on there. And so it's not even always hookups, it's really just sometimes just checking in with friends. So I'm, I'm pretty much on there every day, it's really unusual. If I don't just at least check in, if not, there's too much email, there's too many messages. And it's too hard to clear. So I probably check in every day. Because it's not always about hooking up. It's about, there's a whole network of friends. And for some of them, especially people far away, this is the easiest way to keep in touch with each other. And so I mostly just keeping in touch with people.

12:51

J2: Very nice. That kind of segways or kind of you answered the next question, which was, um, intentions when using the apps if their sexual for friendship, for dating for meeting new people in the community. And sounds like a, as you said, for definitely connections and friends, and maybe a little bit of all the above.

13:12

B2: Sure, especially for people far away, I mean, we're not going to hook up. So it's not, you know, like, people in Fort Lauderdale and people in London and people in Texas.

I'm mostly just sort of touching base with them. And we might be talking about who's traveling or who's going to what event. But it's, you're maintaining that, that contact and network of people that you know, like maybe, maybe I hooked up with somebody in San Antonio when I was there for a conference, but we really had a connection. And so I'm going to continue to chat with them, here and there. And, and if we don't move to the phase of exchanging phone numbers, or being on another social media thing, this semi anonymous app is a good way to keep that relationship where it is for us, we're going to move it to another level. *for sure*.

14:15

J2: Thank you very much. Experiences and interactions on the apps: If you could describe a couple would you say positive or negative or anything at all have a specific example just of experience interaction that you had on the apps?

14:35

B2: Oh, well, I think my bullshit meter is pretty good. And so I [laughs] I kind of pursue people that would be likely possibilities. So I think that's part of it, but Recon, there's almost never any bullshit on Recon. People are there for specific things. And the profiles are very explicit. Like, you're a person who likes bears. You're a person who likes leather. You're a person who likes fisting. That's your a person who likes watersports. Like it's very clear. And so you can sort through people right away, and so there's not really very much garbage on recon. Growlr is so full of fake accounts. *Oh, yeah*. And sort of frustrating that they cannot figure out how to weed out all of those fake bot accounts. So that is my biggest complaint about Growlr, I find that the people are fairly pleasant and fairly respectful. I don't love that live feature. Now of people who live stream, I don't really get the point of that. Unless you're going to be naked [laughs]. I don't really want to watch you watch Ru Paul's Drag Race *sure, sure* eating popcorn in bed with your shirt on? Like, that's not really why I'm on this app. But on so Growlr. There's a couple of weird things about them. But in general, it's it's really good. And we lost- maybe Ron told you we lost our bear group.

16:21

J2: Yeah, unfortunately,

16:23

B2; They just couldn't keep it going. And so in some ways, that is one of the main ways we are still connected, is on Growlr. Because most of them are- most of them are there.

16:37

J2: Thank you. Um, we're kind of on the second of third sections kind of are going into the second section. And I've kind of dubbed this body politics. So if I may ask, how would you perceive maybe different body types and why so for example, if I use the adjectives to describe someone that's hairy, or fat or slim, chubby, muscular, scruffy? Does anything in particular, come to mind? Or, or perceptions?

17:15

B2: Oh, so um so sure. I mean, I think of all of the animal terms that we use bears and otters and all that stuff. *Mhm* I generally think of bears as being middle aged or older. I generally don't think of 20- something bears. I guess it could be. But I do you all have that bias of a bear is probably a little bit more mature. And if you're in your 20s, you're probably a cub, even if you're a bigger guy. Yeah, cubs and bears and otters. Grizzly bears, polar bears, silver bears. All of that terminology makes sense. I like I like scruff. I like I like adding the adjectives of like muscle bear, *mhm,mhm* those sorts of things. But yeah, I mean, I had no idea of that community until I landed in Philadelphia, for my last degree. And there's a really good bear community and leather community in Philadelphia. And that's where I started to hang out with people who liked daddies and who liked bears, but I had no idea that that was a thing before I landed there, which was '98. And I really didn't grow into a bear kind of persona until early 2000s.

18:45

J2: Okay. Would you say that physical appearance is important to you? And if so, how or why?

18:59

B2: Well, I mean, I think I have a broad range of people have physical types that I find attractive, but I would say physical appearance is important, partly because of health and taking care of yourself. Like I think of I think if I'm judging, I'm judging physical appearance more on is this person healthy and happy and secure. less worried about exactly how heavy they are or how tall they are or how attractive you know, whatever arguably attractive they are. But I am generally attracted to bigger guys and more muscley guys, and I'm fine with any degree of hairiness and, but you can sort of tell people who are comfortable in their own skin, and I think that is maybe the most comfortable. The most attractive trait *mhm, mhm*.

20:07

J2: Very good liberal mindset, I would say. Do you feel that your body is fetishized? And if so, how does that make you feel?

20:19

B2: Oh, so I- Yes, I have found some people who are super into bellies, or super into fur, or, or nipples. And I'm totally fine with that. I'm totally fine with attention. I like to know going in. Like, I'm going to be rubbing your belly for half an hour. Like I kind of like knowing going in for that. Um- but yeah, that's totally fine with me.

20:54

J2: Very good. And on the flip side, have you ever fetishized someone else's body or appearance?

21:02

B2: Oh, sure. And same thing, I try to be upfront, I try to say, you know, I'm attracted to you because of this thing that you have, which is super hot to me. And if we're together, I'm going to spend a lot of a lot of time on this. And how does that work for you?

21:22

J2: And kind of a closing question in the area of fetishization, do you find fetishization to be positive, negative? Neither neutral?

21:36

B2: Oh, well. I think that you can be, I think that you can be abusive and tokenize someone if you're not respectful, if you don't have, you know, boundaries and respect their boundaries. So I try to be, you know, attentive and be clear about what everybody's getting out of this. I mean, I've, I've had people go too far, or do things that we didn't agree on doing that were out of bounds. And, you know, and, and stop seeing them. But I think as long as people are, you know, treating people with respect, and, you know, because I'm in the kink scene, we kind of have to engineer a scene, *sure* and say, Okay, we're going to do this, and you're going to do this, and I'm going to do this. And your safe word is this. And, and now I'm pretty explicit about what's the language. What's the verbiage that you need me to use? And what's too far? Like? Are there any words that are a complete no-no for you? *mhm* So now, you know, I try to work that stuff out beforehand.

23:06

J2: Mhm. Have you ever experienced I'm kind of going back to the apps for a quick second? Have you ever experienced discrimination on the apps?

23:17

B2: Oh, sure. I mean, when you disclose like, it's in my profile. So I think I'm transparent.

23:27

J2: Sure, shouldn't be a surprise.

23:29

B2: Right? Sometimes they just don't read. When I disclose what my weight is, or disclose what my age is, then all of a sudden now- if I disclose what, like if we're, if we're talking about meeting, and and there's specific things that somebody wants to do that are off like, for me, because I'm in this public, this very public position *sure* I can't just have sex in somebody's car, *right* Like I, you know, certainly when I was teaching public school, but even now teaching college, I'm not going to have sex in a park. I'm not going to let somebody blow me in a park in somebody's car. Because that would end my career if we get arrested. And so sometimes people think that just because you're kinky, everything is on the table *sure, sure* But that and then sometimes that completely shuts them down and then they're mad and they feel like you wasted their time. But I mean, I never promised that I was going to let you blow me in a park. I didn't know that was going to be on the menu, and that's something that we really can't do. And then I have a- have some weird rules about married guys [coughs]. And of course, I don't sleep with students. And so now I'm at a big university, where there are a lot of students and graduate students. And so I try to fish out and eliminate students, because

I don't want to sleep with students, even if they're not my students. But then I try not to sleep with married guys, because it just seems so messy. I mean, married to a woman on the DL, guys, and once in a while, when I say, when I get the sense that they're married, and I say, I'm just not comfortable with that. Why don't you, you know, move on to somebody else. Sometimes they get really mad.

25:47

J2: That's kind of crazy to hear.

25:50

B2: Yeah, they get really mad, how dare you? She knows! it's none of your business. How dare you judge? There's a good reason why I have to do this. Blah, blah, blah. But of course, you know, the deck is stacked against them. Because generally, men are pigs, and we'll do anything and say anything to get off. So. So generally, I don't want to sleep with married guys. And occasionally, somebody reacts really negatively to that.

26:28

J2: Was not expecting that. That's very interesting.

26:31

B2: Yeah, they get mad, they get mad. Yeah. Like, and, and then, you know, then they block you. And, but you know, it's okay, do what you need to do. But that's just something I'm not comfortable with. And I've never had to deal with, you know, the jealous spouse coming after me. *right* But, you know, that's not something I want to deal with. I don't need that kind of drama.

26:59

J2: At the end of the day, you have to everyone has to do what makes him or her or them comfortable. For sure.

27:04

B2: Right. So like, married, and couple gay guys. I'm going to believe them when they say we have this arrangement. And so a gay couple, and one of them needs something on the side, I'm going to believe him when he says, We're not monogamous, or we get to play, we just don't get to tell each other about it. Or we can play but we can't play at home *mhm, mhm*. Like, I believe that those things. And if that works out great. But for like, married to a woman with kids. It just that feels icky to me.

27:44

J2: a whole- whole other world. *yeah*. May I ask you to briefly describe your personal relationship with your body?

27:57

J2: *What does that mean? [laughs]* I guess- Are you happy with your appearance? Are you happy in your own skin? Are you not? Or is there something you would change or anything like that.

28:11

B2: Oh-sure. So I have not lost my COVID weight yet. I'm still up-

28:16

J2: Makes two of us!

28:18

B2: I'm still a full 35 pounds of COVID weight. But I've had, as Ron may have told you, I've had two surgeries during this time period, and that has really set me back. And I mean, it's nothing serious. It's just that, you know, it's enough of a surgery that you can't do a lot of movement, and you're laid up for six weeks. And you have to be careful how you move after that, and blah, blah, blah. And so right now, I wish I could get rid of that weight. And in fact, I talked to my doctor about the new drugs that are on the market, but I'm one of those on the cusp people I don't have diabetes. And so I- my insurance probably won't pay for the new drugs. That might be helpful. And so I've got to just figure it out myself and figure out how to get how to drop some of this weight. So right now I'm heavier than I would like to be but in general, I'm okay with my body. I'm okay with how everything is I'm comfortable being naked in front of people. *mhm* I'm fine.

29:33

J2: Very good. Last question for kind of the body politics session. Section sorry. Have you had an experience or relationship with someone that you would describe as or consider to be generally not your type?

29:53

B2: Oh once in a while, yes. Once in a while somebody will not be what I was expecting. And but I feel like I made a commitment and I need to go through with it. And so occasionally Yes, I will have grin it bear it sex with someone, even though I am kind of faking it. But that rarely happens because like I said, I'm pretty good at figuring out who everybody is and what, what's going on. But once in a while, either I misunderstand, or somebody is not quite honest in their profile. And then, once in a while, they'll be like a bi-curious younger person, with daddy issues, and they talk a good game, but then when they get here, they really aren't quite ready. And so then you kind of throw out the playbook and you do whatever is going to make this somewhat comfortable and not scare them away and not have them freak out. But in general, in general, now, I- mostly- things are are what I expect them to be.

31:22

J2: Thank you. The next few questions will deal with the bear community. And I think you already mentioned that you identify as a bear, consider yourself to be a bear. If that's correct, can I ask when you started identifying as such, or using the term bear for yourself?

31:40

B2: Sure. So I started dating this cub in Philadelphia, around 2000 and going to a bear bar, and I didn't even know that term at all. But he's the one who introduced me to the term, and he took me to think it's called Hills-, Hillsdale, Hillside- Hillside? I don't know if you know, this is very kind of famous campground that's two, two and a half hours north of Philadelphia, up in the Poconos. And so they have bear weekends, and drag weekends and leather weekends *OK* and so anyhow, so he really is the one who introduced me to that tournament into the bear community. And, and, you know, really labeled me as a bear. And then the more I did it, the more I felt comfortable with that term. And then I moved to Atlanta, and there was a good bear bar there, there was an eagle there. And so I sort of continued in that in that realm. But yeah, so I was probably 38 maybe before I took on that, that role. Yeah.

33:07

J2: Um, what does it mean to you to be a bear slash part of the bear community and why?

33:14

B2: Well, in my experience, like, you know, there used to be two very active clubs around here. So I was able to socialize a lot. And, and I used to go to bear runs a lot, because there's a lot of bear runs in the Midwest. And so I find the bear community to be really welcoming, and social and fun. There's a wide range of people, I'm a musician, and I'm a teacher. And up around here, there's a ton of musicians and teachers, but also a lot of medical people *mhm*, and blue-collar people and professional people who are bears. And so, you know, I found a lot of common ground with them, people who are fun people who like to socialize people who are kind of flirty. People who are up for social time, whether it's board games, or playing poker, or it's going to a bar night. *mhm* And so for me, you know, even though I'm out at work, I do feel a little bit, I don't know, a little bit restrained at work. And so for me, the bear community has been a really great outlet to kind of have a whole separate group of friends who are different than my than my work friends. Now, almost every place I go, I have a couple of gay bear friends who are working with me. And so they also tend to be sort of allies, and we have this kind of connection, you know, on our own, and that also has been really good really helpful. There's something kind of fraternal and protective about bears. *mhm, mhm* And so and now that I'm almost 60, I feel sort of the need to be kind of paternal and protective of some younger guys who maybe have been shunned or, you know, not not treated well, and who are clearly bears in training. And and so I feel like I'm, you know, returning the favor.

35:37

J2: Very, nice. Would you? Do you find the bear community to be exclusionary?

35:46

B2: Well, some places it is. So Columbus is two hours south of me. And I've hung out with some bears in Columbus, and they're pretty shitty to thin people. *Really*? Yeah, I've seen some bears just kind of push some chasers away and say, back off. This party is not for you. And that's surprising to me. But there was some kind of there's kind of a

militant air among that group of bears in Columbus. Now up here, I don't feel it like that. There's some- there's some little guys who hang out with bears in Cleveland and in Akron, and I think people treat them okay. But I have seen bears- I feel like it's a feels a little bit like English boarding school, [laughs] cuz they were hazed, they're going to turn around and haze other people who are not their clique. So I have seen some bad behavior, but it's pretty rare. And then, I mean, I don't know what you see in Europe. I constantly hear from people in Europe that there's never enough big hairy guys in especially like Germany, France, England. And so those guys tend to fly to the US to Palm Springs or to Fort Lauderdale to get like their bear fix in because they don't have enough options over there.

37:31

J2: Yeah, Ron did kind of mention that when he was here. And I guess I, for the most part, like all body types, I like chasers I like big guys. I like hairy guys, I truly like it all. I think a lot of it depends on where you're at. Austria, there's some big guys, but definitely everyone's kind of either a muscle bear or just average weight. In Germany, I think kind of Berlin, just from perusing the apps. there seems to be some bigger guys. And just from my personal experience, I want to say the Slavic countries like there's a handful more bigger guys and Prague and Bratislava for example. So there are big guys for sure. With the European stereotype where there's a little bit thinner and thinner people it does bring some truth so so I've heard chasers here say that's always- there's not enough big guys in Europe. So it's, I think, you know, the, not that we're a special breed but the big Midwestern boys that's, you know, there's not so so many of them here. Whereas they're kind of in abundance in you know, areas like Ohio, New York, PA. *Right, Yeah.* Interesting, the the kind of exclusions of chasers- I've, um- we just kind of recently, I think since October, November got a bear bar, a bear club. Still haven't been yet sadly, got to work on it soon. They do an event once a month. And a friend of a friend was saying that they have a good gay friend. That's a chaser and he wasn't welcomed into this club. They wouldn't let him in at all, which I don't think it's the same club. It has to be something different. Because their posters always say, you know, daddies, boys, chasers, cubs, everyone. So I would imagine it's not this particular club. So it's I'm curious off to do some digging and find out where it is. But it's I think for the most part, we do a decent job of being the subculture in the rainbow that's welcoming to everyone. So more welcoming and accepting. But *Sure*. On that same note, do you find the queer the LGBTIQ community in general to be exclusionary?

39:47

B2: Well, I think a little bit I think that depending on how this the city operates, if there are advocates for the bear community, the leather community, then those people are included in like pride parades. And in events like, you know, Cleveland hosted the gay Olympics. And I think the bears were doing stuff with that. But I think it takes some advocacy, because the the typical Board of Directors of the gay lesbian center does kind of all look like Sean Hayes. Yeah. It doesn't, doesn't really look like their's. So I think that I think that it can be exclusionary, and that I think that well, and also they're exclusionary to women.

40:59

J2: Yeah, unfortunately, that's very true.

41:02

B2: So if you get- if you get sort of open-minded people there who really want to create a broader community, then they will reach- they will reach out. Now, Cleveland has a pretty big Men's Chorus. And so I think that's helpful because there's a bunch of big old bears in that chorus. And so that's kind of the flagship group that performs at all big events. *mhm* And so if they come, if they come, bears come with them. And so I think, you know, that that helps with advocacy and awareness. But like, you know, Akron doesn't have a Gay Men's Chorus, it's got to be a city big enough for a Gay Men's Chorus for which like Cleveland is Chicago has two even Albany, New York has one. But you know, you have to be a decent sized city or metro area, to have enough critical mass to have a Gay Men's Chorus.

42:07

J2: Last question on the community, and then we'll move to the last section of the interview. Last part of interview. You had already mentioned a couple of these. So just ways to describe bears at the beginning of the interview. But in addition to that, do you know of any labels language phrases that would be unique to the bear community? I guess so in addition to So, silver daddy, muscles bear that type of thing.

42:35

B2: Sure. So right, so. So there's all of these, all these animal terms, otters and bears and silverbacks, and silver bears, and grizzly bears and polar bears. And then there's sometimes some weird language about black bears and white bears. And Asian bears like pandas, right, so your people called pandas, so sometimes this is kind of slightly odd racial terms that come in with bear stuff. But I think mostly people are using it just because that's what they're attracted to, I don't think I don't think there meaning it for it to be pejorative. And then there's, there's this weird language around hairiness and so you're sometimes being described where the hair is, right, like hair on your back hair on your chest, hair on your butt. And then there's this, people have these very specific formulas of how they like the bellies to be. Like, do they want like this basketball belly, [laughs] want like big all over? Like, you know, there are guys that aren't that thick, but they just have this big basketball belly. *mhm* And then there's guys who are just kind of big all over and thick. And so I think there's some funky descriptions of all of that.*mhm* And, you know, like, I've heard people talk about the lines that you develop, like this line here, underneath your pecs, and the line underneath your belly, and what that overhang looks like, like I've heard people describe, you know, you have that's exactly the kind of overhang I want. Or you have the perfect belly that it's not overhanging yet but it's big, like, so people definitely have these, you know, specific things that they love and thighs and calves like so there is there is funky language about that. You know, bears are having a bar night and they're drinking and they're chatting. They're kind of using These terms to describe, you know, people that they're that they're attracted to.

45:07

J2: And how do you perceive this kind of subcultural bear language? Personally?

45:14

B2: So it's, it is funky like it takes a while for you to get used to it because clearly, they, they are fantasizing about a specific body type. But because generally, it is. It is. Well, a group of guys who sometimes are excluded are winners because of this [laughs] analogy. *yeah* It feels kind of vindicating. Because there's somebody who really likes bellies. And and so I do I find it endearing. But yes, I guess you could think of it as objectifying, but I find it endearing. And I feel like people who may have been wallflowers for some of their life, are getting a little more attention and that's a nice thing.

46:17

J2: Thank you. The last few questions for the interview will deal with kind of community identity and connections that are both online and offline. So the first question, in the conclusionary part, if you did not use the apps when you first came out, or identified as gay, how did you meet other gay men or find a sense of community, for example?

46:44

B2: Right, so- so I was in this weird phase of, of just after HIV came out, and so bathhouses, and some of the cruisier places were shutting down, but the bars were still doing well. So like I was in college, when HIV came out. *mhm* So that, you know, freaked everybody out. *sure* So this was early '80s. And so immediately, Departments of Health were closing down bathhouses. And so that kind of cruisey bathhouses and bookstores that kind of cruisey location, were getting closed down. *mhm* But the bars were still a big center to meet people. So in my mid 20s, I was meeting people at bars. And because I was a musician, I was meeting people doing music and doing theater.

47:55

J2: Very good. And you said those the '80s, roughly, or?

48:01

B2: Yeah, so I started teaching in '87. And so that's really when I was, you know, on my own, I didn't have the benefit of a, you know, a college campus of 30,000, horny people, [laughs] all clumped into one place. And so then I had to figure it out myself. And so then I started finding my way to bars. And, and going to bars and meeting people at bars. But also luckily, you know, I was part of a music community. And so of course, I was meeting gay people in musical theater and in, and music gigs. And so the combination of those two things was, was how I was meeting people.

48:45

J2: So if I may ask, I guess, would you say the '90s is when anything digitally would have occurred? In terms of apps or cruising or online or?

48:55

B2: So I'd say that those like chat room, things *mhm* like those Yahoo rooms, and AOL group rooms, I think that was happening in the early 90s. *ok* And bars were still doing okay. But people were starting to cluster. And Yahoo is, of course, just a tiny little shadow of what it used to be. *sure* But for all these, they have these chat rooms. And then they would have location specific chat rooms, like an Albany chat room and Poughkeepsie chat room and Springfield, Massachusetts chat room. And so that's how people were meeting semi-anonymously and setting up a hookup off of those chats.

49:43

J2: Thank you very much. Just kind of to fuse together our concluding question. Would you say that? I guess I'm interested in what kind of helped you mold your identity or find your community was it specifically the bars and the musicians, or was it exclusively offline was exclusively online, depending on timeframe, or maybe a combination of the both?

50:12

Well, I mean, I didn't find a bear identity until Philadelphia. And so it was definitely meeting bears and chasers. And going to a really good bear bar, there's a great bear bar called the Bike Stop, that has a bear community and a leather community. And that's when I figured out what they were talking about, and who those people were. So I mean, through the period that we've been talking about, I was still dating, like gym jocks, and twinks and muscle guys, I didn't -the bear word, I just don't even think that was a thing yet. And I could not find people. It was hard to find people who looked like that and looked like me. But by the time I got to, by the time it was, I got to Philadelphia in '98. Then I started to look and feel a little bit more like a bear. But I got glommed on to by this fixture in the bear community, who worked at the LGBTQ Center, and played pool at this bear bar. And he, I we literally the first time I met him, he picked me up. [laughs] He's this real, he's this huge black guy picked me up, and then just kind of welcomed me into that community because I was, you know, I was fresh meat, I just arrived to Philadelphia, even though it's a big city, you know, it, a new person did make an appearance there. And so it was really him. His name was Dean, it was really Dean. And I became part of his little circle of friends. And then I felt very comfortable in that bar because he had kind of validated me. And so that's really where I got that I that bear identity.

52:20

J2: Thank you very much.

52:21

B2: It was definitely a personal. I mean, I can still very clearly remember, and my friends still tell the story about about watching him pick me up. So I can very clearly remember a second floor bar, where the pool tables and the bar were, and meeting him for the first time and him in kind of inducting me into that community

52:46

J2: Super sweet! Is there anything else you would like to [clears throat] excuse me- add before we end the interview? Or?

52:56

B2: Well, maybe I'll say something about the intersection of bear and leather and kink. *sure* So um, you know, I think there is a fairly healthy mix of bear and leather and kink people. And, you know, here Cleveland has a big leather event. And I started going to that event because they used to have bear parties. And they'd have one night where they'd have a bear party. And so that was my little dipping my toe into what the leather community was like. And then as I kind of moved into my Daddy Bear phase, I kept getting asked to do lots more kink stuff, and being pursued by more chasers and boys *mhm*-subs. And I had to learn how to do some kink stuff. And so I like the fact that the leather community accepts bears being part of it, and that bears except people being kind of kinky. *mhm* Well, and that, that, that was a natural progression for me. And and that's why, you know, I'm on Recon as well. But again, you know, clearly that I'm the- I'm a bear, I'm not really like a muscle leather guy, but a bear guy. And so I do think that that that combination is one that you find a lot all over the place and I'm not the drag queen kind of bear. Not that there's anything wrong with that. But you know, I'm, I'm, I'm just not built or wired that way. I'm kind of wired more to be more maybe on the masculine side of the spectrum. *mhm* And, and so that was a natural way for me to go.

54:59

J2: Just out of personal curiosity, if I may ask, Was kink always part of your personal identity your interest? Or do you think that kind of developed, as you said, with the daddy-phase and with interactions with boys, chasers and so forth?

55:16

B2: Oh, yeah, no, no, in fact, I was kind of really conservative. I mean, I didn't, I didn't fuck anything until I was probably 36/37. Like, I was even kind of afraid of anal for for the longest time, and didn't have any experience. And finally, I had a good partner in my early 40s. And I learned everything I learned about anal from him. And so no, it took me a long time to get to get more adventurous. And so. So I think maybe I always had a little bit of interest based on like, the porn I watched. But I was definitely, you know, not not very adventurous and was not, and was kind of intimidated by bondage, and impact play, and all of that stuff. And I didn't understand that everybody has their own little niche. *mhm, mhm* It's not one big package. And like, if you go to a leather club, you're gonna get fisted, like, I didn't quite understand that all of that is all another smorgasbord, and you pick and choose what you want. So it took me a while to figure out and then I figured out that there were these, you know, subs, who needed me to be this way with them, for them to get off. And then it became kind of a role to play and me learning how to play that role. So yeah, it was it was mostly out of the desire to be more adventurous, but also to meet people's needs when they had specific fetishes that they wanted fulfilled. Because I'm a giver, like that. [laughs]

57:25

J2: Hey everybody loves a giver! And it's, it's in a sense, I wanna say, I guess, wholesome. It's- there's just a whole rainbow out there, metaphorically, so to speak. And there's- it's it's limitless, you can there's just because when you're a cub you're into this doesn't mean you can't grow into something else or learn something else when you grow into the daddy-phase, so to speak. *sure*. And thank you for touching on all of those intersections, I think that's very, very relevant. And it's, it's for sure, in academic discourse and Gender Studies, more so queer theory, queer studies, but I think it's still neglected. And there's finally kind of an area for BDSM studies slowly on the rise. So I think it's always important to have that conversation and break it into daily, you know, queer culture, but also into academia when it's possible.

58:18

B2: So one of my colleagues at Kent, he focuses on Gender Studies, but especially cartooning. *okay*. And so he does a lot of writing and archetypal, different cultures', cartoons and different cultures' archetypes of superheroes and the sort of gay themes that you see in, in cartoons. And, you know, the back kind of muscle-bound, savior-figure, it's sort of hard to, but yeah, *sure* I think that's another thing that's happening in academia is taking, taking some of those other threads. And then finally, kind of uncovering the little the gay themes that run through them. But he's one of the bears here at Kent that I can hang out with and, and we text each other during the school day and, and chit-chat about things and he's super nice. But yeah, his his area is Gender Studies, and especially English and, and cartoon literature. Well, good luck with your project.

59:42

J2: Thank you very much. I'll um, if there's nothing else to add, I'll end the recording real quick. Pause there and...

Interview 3

Tue, Jul 25, 2023 9:36PM • 50:49

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

apps, people, fetish, general, bit, positive, bear, longest time, body, studying, slim, physical appearance, put, type, corolla, growler, dating, negative, guess, pseudonym

00:00

J3: Very good. So *Should I introduce myself a little?* Let me read the guidelines super quick, then yes Absolutely! So I'm Jeff working on my master's thesis, I will record our interview today with Hans, transcribe it and delete it after the and we'll delete it after recording the transcription. We'll also use a pseudonym when referring to what you said in the research report, so if something makes you uncomfortable, please feel free to say pass. Could you introduce yourself? In a few words,

00:31

H3: I can pass a question I see. In a few words. I'm Hans

00:37

H3: [partner in the background mentions effectiveness of noise-cancelling headphones] *I Can't hear you, by the way, like literally.* Okay, super

00:46

H3: I grew up in Upper Austria. And living in Vienna since 2005. [partner yawns in background]. And I have been studying media technology and digital media. And I'm working now in the video industry, basically in the visual effects industry as a compositor. And I am gay! [both laugh]

01:16

J3: That's critical information! Not so critical. Thank you for the introduction. *Was it enough?* Yeah, of course!

01:24

H3: I'm 41 years old. That's maybe relevant. Yeah.

01:28

J3: So thank you very much. So the first section will kind of look at an overview of dating and gay dating and hookup apps. And you do use apps? Yes, may I ask? *Yes I do* Could I ask you to describe the role that they play in your life? So which apps do you use? And maybe for example, when did you start using them?

01:53

H3: Okay, so I'm using it, yes. Basically- Where do I start? I, the first apps, the first app I used was called Growlr, actually back in the in the day and it's, it's really quite a few,

quite a few years ago, I think, when it got popular during my studies. Wait, I studied I started studying in 2011. So around I think 2015 or so I got introduced to those apps. So this one I know I just don't quite know yet how much I should get into details now. What will be covered in further questions or not? Because I can tell you which one, which ones else I use shortly we'll have the first question.

02:54

J3: All right, there's no right or wrong. However, You're comfortable. It's just a guideline so don't stress yourself out.

02:59

H3: Okay, so for the longest time recently, I was mainly using W-Bear. But since like we went on vacation in March to Gran Canaria, it was a very, like, gay party-oriented vacation. I got the idea there to install several additional apps. So I'm not regularly using those but I do have many of them now installed. Meaning Scruff also Grindr, Growlr and W-Bear. I'm gonna have a quick check if that's that's- that's all-I think yes. They're all grayed out now because I'm in concentration mode.

04:02

J3: That's okay, I have a folder for all of my gay apps called Trash. So I- do the same thing. [both laugh]

04:08

H3: Okay, so basically, we just have those four. I just mentioned at *mhm* Started when I was like like during studying basically.

04:25

H3: *reads interview guideline*do you notice any major differences in the apps if you use more than one? I mean, a difference I was- noticed I only for the longest time as I said used Growlr then stopped actually using Growlr during, my studies because it got too distracting for me, because I noticed how, how addictive it is. *mhm* And it really, I mean, really felt like I should probably reduce, like, that type of thing. And I think I really De-installed it there for quite a while also had no interest in in trying other apps was basically it was interested in porn; I would just get it basically otherwise. And so sexting was was not was not relevant or just really reduced it. But so I can mainly then compare the Growlr to the what I've been using now for the late for the longest time W-Bear. The main difference there is that W-Bear is more like an Instagram type of app, *okay* which I actually really preferred it was, it was not so much centered on texting, if you didn't want to. It was basically just what I actually then preferred. It was like casually being able to browse through pictures, and there was also more pictures, then there was there on Growlr, because as far as I know, on. Growlr you only have your one profile pic that's by default available. And if you click the profile, how is it again? Is it Do you have three than you? Can you see? Or do you always just see my picture? Do you know that by the way?

06:22

J3: On Growlr? Growlr, it's usually just one and then I think there's the private media gallery.

06:27

H3: Exactly, But yeah- a person really has to unlock?

06:30

J3: Sure, sure- Yeah, but by default, you only see one, yeah.

06:33

H3: Okay, that's that's why I really preferred the W-Bear app because the idea of having a public profile that doesn't continue to do basically, but also like shows how the person really is in more detail that was more appealing to me. That's why I stuck- *mhm* stuck to using that for a while.

06:59

J3: Very good. So- that's a pretty good difference. How would you say how often do you use the apps?

07:09

H3: To be honest, I would say daily for sure. *mhm* [whispers] um- I have, um, I'd be lying [laughs] with that. There are there, are like phases where I have when it's basically really stressful in private life or in job life. That several days. I don't open them *Mhm, mhm* But I would say usually they they end. But it can't happen that I don't open them for free for these. That's, that's how it works.

07:50

J3: I'd say it's very similar to myself. *yeah* And if I may ask, what are your main intentions when using the app today for sexual experiences or friendship, dating, meeting new people in the community? All of the above?

08:04

H3: Yeah, it's, it's- it totally depends basically on the situation in general. For example, I used W-Bear basically just for for inspiration basically as a as a source of as, as, basically as a porn source. Also, *mhm* to be totally honest. With the additional benefit of being able to contact people that you that you've that you basically find attractive or like, so it's basically for getting in touch base- for one getting in touch basically, that's just one reason porn reason is, is a different one. And

08:57

H3: Um, yeah- recently, since since um my partner, and I opened our relationship fully a year ago from from now on. Meaning we basically our relationship is now at the point where we say we allow ourselves to have like playdates with with other people. Solo basically yeah. So that's why I use those apps now. Also for for getting, finding basically people if I'm in the mood [for fun, for sure], if it fits. Yeah, so also for dating reasons, basically. I would say

09:47

J3: Very good. *Yeah*. Thank you very much. If I can ask you to maybe describe a- your experiences and interactions on the map. On the apps. Sorry. Would you say that they're positive or negative? Or neutral? And do you maybe have a specific example in general that you think of?

10:08

H3: So I think it really depends on on how what's I think it can easily go go in either direction that the experiences you get, depending on how, how serious you take those. So in my experience, the interaction with these apps are more positive. *mhm* Because the way they work in general is that if you show pictures of yourself, people who are interested, like and comment those, those, those pictures, and that's something that's, that creates basically a positive mood or is like, enhancing self-esteem and just makes you feel maybe a little bit better about yourself and be be more more more self - accepting. So, I think that's really the effect. This these apps can have. Also, for the reason that they- because they're, they're like, in theory, depending on how you use them also are anonymous. *mhm for sure* So just if you if you just can do your face and a pseudonym, as a as a word, you can just really be a bit more free and and explore your needs or your sexuality. *for sure* I would say I have mostly positive experiences, and rarely- and those experiences mainly come from W-bear. *Okay*, with not too much too much chatting, you know, because I realized that there's other apps, I think, Grindr, for example, is if you're a bit more active on there, alone, for the reason that the community there is larger, there's of course, also more people that are prompted that don't behave well. *sure, sure* Let's -let's put it like -like this, they're a bit more forceful. So if you don't you, if you don't move around in that area too much. You're not exposed, basically, to those kinds of people that much. *mhm* So I think it really depends on how you use them and what you use. If it's positive or negative experience

12:52

J3: And maybe it depends on what you're up to. It sounds like a little bit.

12:58

H3: Totally yeah. So trying to think if I have negative examples too. Only basically like a very, very few, very few occasions, it was like that one or the other chat, ran a bit into - into a bit of a weird direction. And you you basically wanted to, to stop the interaction with with with a guy. And occasionally that guy kept on basically posting you or texting you and wouldn't quite understand your signs basically. To to -that you actually don't want any interaction anymore. But that rarely happens. Because, as I tried to point out in the beginning, usually people who are attracted to each other start the conversation, *sure* or get into a deeper conversation. If I if I text someone, and I don't get a response, that's a response then too and I know, okay, that's fine. Moving on, for starters, because there's other people. So that's why in general, I think it's rather easy to have positive experience with these apps. *mhm* And although that's of course, a very subjective thing too *for sure*

14:25

J3: positive and negative activity. It's different for everybody for sure. That's just your own personal realm. *yeah* Thank you. Thank you. Um, the next section is kind of body politics, so to speak. So the first question, how do you perceive different body types and why so for example, if I were to use the adjectives hairy, fat, slim, chubby, muscular. Just in general, you don't have to answer every single one, but perception is what comes to mind.

14:59

H3: I Just in that's basically a very subjective question now. So you basically just want to know how I feel about different body types

15:13

J3: essentially yeah. *yeah, okay* I guess maybe you could kind of think of the adjectives is like painting blobs. What's the first thing that comes to mind? Is it negative or positive or good or bad? Or, for example?

15:25

H3: I'm just curious. What? In which, which- I have no problem telling you. *Yeah* I'm just a bit curious on how how this information is really helpful. In that regard. What do you want to do with that information?

15:42

J3: I guess really just curiosity. The inspiration for my thesis was this horrible catchphrase no fats, no, femes, no Asians? I don't know if you've ever heard that, that used to be used in Growlr and a lot of apps. So very, very exclusionary.

15:55

H3: So as a description, people would want what's list that next to their profile?

15:58

J3: or people would say they people that don't want bigger people or hairier people or people of Asian descent, they would put that kind of tag on their profile to say, Hey, if you fall under this category belong to these subcultures that don't even talk to me *that's very terrible* Yeah- no, no, no, I'm not saying that's what you're doing. But I was curious for how do certain adjectives make people feel or think, or

16:21

H3: I was basically that just lucky enough to never get in touch too much with those scenarios or people, but yeah in general

16:42

H3: in general, I would say since since I, I've grown to really like, and be attracted to the bear community. Basically, most most of those of those words that are listed here are exactly body types that I am interested in. And to be honest, and this is just a very personal preference. Slim is something that I personally don't perceive as interesting.

mhm, mhm That's that's how I would I would put it I would always try and never discriminate basically someone for being too slim and all but

17:34

J3: Sure- but at the end of the day, we're attracted to what we're attracted to. As long as we're respectful there's nothing wrong with that.

17:40

H3: Is it people like slim people try to contact me I mean, if it's if it's overwhelming, I don't respond at all basically, because it's just too exhausting, yeah. But if I say I get the feeling for you, for example, and somebody's really like what's the word he's really höfflich *uh, polite* or really polite basically and and not like a bit creative maybe even with his with his like incoming messages that I will always try to kindly let the person know that he's actually not my type. But yeah,

18:26

J3: very good. Yep. Um, is would you say physical appearance is important to you? If so, how or why?

18:39

H3: In what terms with what goal physical appearance?

18:43

J3: I just- what you're attracted to how somebody looks or even how you look or is that

18:47

H3: Oh it's definitely important to me. Of course. So I'm not the type of, for me, as I said, if somebody is is like, a super kind person and we are totally on the same wavelength or something, then that's friendship area for me. I really have would have a hard time getting sexually active physically with a person so it is it is a very important thing to me, yes.

19:20

J3: Very good. Have you ever felt that your body has been fetishized your- yourself personally? If so, how does that make you feel?

19:30

H3: If my body if my body is is being being seen as a as a fetish?

19:41

J3: I guess we're for example so how a chaser would approach me like oh, you have such a big belly and you're so beautiful, has maybe a bear done that to you, or another man done that to basically just on specific of your specific physical appearances or your beard or characteristics?

19:59

H3: To be honest, I think not- nothing too specific so- I wouldn't -I not I can't think of an example from the spot now that somebody said oh you have like I mean apart from I mean that's that's that's silly to say but of course people sometimes really love your genitals.

20:26

J3: Yes, yes.

20:26

H3: That's of course something if you're on those apps and you're sharing basically dick pics or naked pics of you -there is people who just really adore basically what they can see so I get those but it didn't get like are you have you're such like just a muscular you have such as tiny belly or you have that that I didn't really get mainly like overall sexy basically, that's that's what I would probably would probably get. So I and so I don't think that's basically fetish.

21:04

J3: Sure- also fetish can be subjective, too. It's everything subjective in terms of gender, and sexuality.

21:12

H3: And how does that make me feel uh- of course, it's always nice to get compliments short. So that's how I feel about it. I've always tried to be appreciative. Like, I am always trying to compliment, or I try and be complimented guy to others. Because I know how nice it feels.

21:39

J3: Very good. Kind of on the opposite end to flip the question around, Have you ever fetishized someone else's body or their appearance? Or?

21:46

H3: Oh, absolutely. Since I'm, like, as I briefly mentioned, in the bear community, if there's if I was lucky enough to basically meet someone who like, really fits my personal description of a bear. Then I of course, like freely fetish fet-ish-ize him basically.

Exactly, yes. So.

22:20

J3: would you say that, in your personal opinion, fetishization in general, is it a positive thing? Negative neutral? Neither?

22:29

H3: Interesting question too. I think this- I think this is nothing really you can control you have control of- that's what was first comes to my mind, you can because you can't you don't really have control of, of what do you experience. What would you what you develop as a fetish basically, *sure, for sure* It's, it's, it's hard to say this is something positive or negative, because it happens to you, basically, that's how I think about it. But

in general, it's, it's a guess it's a bit of a positive thing. Because it's -makes it a bit well. I mean, in general, I would say, people, it's not the worst thing to happen if people develop fetishes because -because of because of the variety that basically, where I'm trying to go is like I'm gonna put this with, with a bit of luck. And and and enough research, you can find basically, almost everywhere groups that are maybe interested in the type of fetish you provide. *for sure* That's that's what it's a bit complicated to to to say. But that's why I would say it's a positive thing that's that that in general exists, because it enables all the various types of body types and colors and characteristics to find a target audience for sure and make those people then actually feel good about themselves because they have an asset, maybe somebody else doesn't have. That's, that's that's why I would see the whole fetish in a rather positive area, I think.

24:42

J3: Thank you very much. Have you ever personally experienced discrimination on the apps?

24:52

H3: To be honest, only in a sense of like being being ignored, basically, I think that's what be the In the apps, I mean yeah, I think I think it's just being ignored. That's That's discrimination. But as I said, I feel Yeah, yeah. As I said, I also, basically do it myself, because you, oftentimes you just don't have the time. Basically. There's no intention behind it. Yeah. But that's discrimination. You know, and I'm also talking specifically on the apps not in real life. Right, um, specifically on the apps, but I'm interested in, um,

25:43

H3: I mean, if there's something in real life you'd like to share, ,

25:45

H3: I could, I mean, I try and try and be brief the thing is, in the bear community, of course, that there is in general, the there is this idea of chasers and bears. But in my experience, and I'm -but it took me quite quite some time to understand that better -or get a better feel about it. It's the -it's more likely than not that the bearish types are into bearish types themselves also only so like, the chances that they're interested in a chaser is in my, in my experience, in general, or statistically maybe a bit lower. So that too can feel to emotions of being discriminated or being being basically less interesting. But it's just like, it's just the thing that you basically have to deal with *sure* because there's nothing you can do. You're born with your essence like this. This is just the way it is basically, and everyone is best off to as soon as possible. Except, and go with exactly how, how you are basically. That's, that's, that's how we put it.

27:16

J3: I never thought about that before how chasers, it'd be harder to find someone that's -generally speaking, but it makes sense. It makes it easier.

27:25

H3: I mean, I that's that's basically oftentimes the thing the reason that that you are get ghosted on on apps? Because if you're basically not, like, bearish enough, not hairy enough, you just won't get a response. Yeah. And they can be very depressing. If you just happen to have this fetish *sure*.

27:50

J3: Thank you. May I ask you to briefly describe your relationship with your body. If you're comfortable doing so?

27:58

H3: I am, [flat mate heard entering the flat from hallway] *hello* *hello! *. But it's so weird to speed these things up now with someone I...

28:08

J3: like I said you could you can totally pass

28:10

H3: I'm actually -I am fine with it. So, the honest truth is that I -that for the for the longest time, I had not a good relationship with my body, I was really like being rather depressed about it about my my, my shape. And it goes actually, so far, for for example, I had the longest time the impression that I had on not just the impression, I had quite the big man boobs, you know, they developed when I was in my late teens, and I always like felt really, really uncomfortable being being naked in the in in public and in general just not not happy basically with with my body. So, this this led to also quite some low low self-esteem, you know, and like the aftereffects basically come from it. But I assume at some point in my in my early 30s or middle middle 30s I actually got the idea to start doing sports a bit more. And then I realized how one's body can transform and that actually helped me a lot to appreciate the body that much more. So I would say over time I have developed now quite a good relationship with my body. But that is also but is I if I could like if there was a magic fairy that It will come and say, Do you want to change? So of course, things would change. I would, for example, by myself would love to look more bearish, like being general chunkier and hairier. Because it would be it would make make me be able to access more people. I'm interested in it at least in my in my head. *Sure, sure*. That's, that's, that's the idea.

30:28

J3: Very good. Thank you for thank you for sharing, that very courageous. *You're welcome*. Last question kind of on the body and politics, so to speak. Have you ever had an experience or a relationship with someone that you consider to be not your type, or you're someone that doesn't have the ideal body type or appearance that you're attracted to?

30:52

H3: An experience or relationship meaning friendship and sexual experiences? *Anything, everything* Everythig. Like, I mean, friendships is I would, of course, say, their, my, my, my, my types? My preferences don't really are too – are not too relevant

because to interact with people, it would be pretty bad, if just *uhh, yeah, yeah* [both laugh]. *Oh, there's probably people out there that well...-unfortunately* Yeah, I know. *No, no- I'm not insinuating that's you*. Yeah. That's not how I tick, *for sure, for sure* But in relationship and, and sexual experiences, I basically also only tried to stick to people to totally like my, in my realm of interest, trying to think if I ever tried to really go far away from it. But I think I haven't yet. Only- Well, no, let's let's get to that. *Yeah, sure*.

32:05

J3: For sure. Next few questions will deal with a bear community. Do you identify yourself as a bear or part of the community? Would you say?

32:19

H3: I don't identify myself as a bear simply because I have my own basically definition of it. And I guess that's a common definition I have. But I am not big. I'm not hairy. Basically, I just in quotes have a beard. But in my opinion, that doesn't. That's that's not the definition of a bear for for me personally, I am quite aware that the definition of a bear is broad, *absolutely* can be different for everybody, for sure* Secondly,

32:53

H3: I'm totally fine with that. In fact, I quite appreciate that you know, that it's not so set in stone. And that definition is a broad one and I have been called bear. Although - although I don't feel like one.

33:12

J3: Thank you very much. In you would say you consider yourselves to be part of the community the bear community.

33:21

H3: Since I basically roam around in that community for so long and have many bearish friends, I would say yes, I'm part of it.

33:34

J3: Um, and what does it mean for you to be a part of that so that we can use it? A good thing is are you indifferent? Is it a very positive thing? Or?

33:45

H3: To be honest, I mean, that there's a reason why I basically joined that community. That's for one, it's actually was not a voluntary voluntary choice, but mainly just like a thing that's, that's in you like, the same as you will notice at some point that you are gay, you notice that you are into some specific types of men. And at some point in life, I just realized, okay, this is actually called bear what what I like? So- um. you were asking if I'm how I feel about being in the community. *Yeah*

34:38

J3: If you're if you're glad that it exists, or

34:40

H3: I -in general, of course, like super glad that in that the community actually got more popular over the years, because it's just easier to- and more visible, you know, like it's easier to access basically people and also more apps kept appearing. And um-

35:12

J3: yeah, I do feel, I do feel like comfortable and mostly comfortable in that community, with the exception that it sometimes can be a bit depressing when you have, like a series of, of unlucky experiences where you just happen to, to face people who just really aren't into you basically. Yeah. So if you really like, don't get enough appreciation basically for for who you are. And that this is this is something that's that, I think, is, is a bit of a problematic thing in the in the bear scene, but it's actually every type of social life a problem if you just don't fit physically, basically into a certain point. It's like, I would say like, if there's blonde women, and you're just aren't, naturally blonde, you want to ever feel basically the same acceptance or you know what I mean? Absolutely, basically. In general, I would say it's, it's nice that it exists and to be to be able to take part of it.

36:28

H3: But it comes with its difficulties too. *Yeah*

36:30

H3: especially if you're not a big yourself.

36:35

J3: Sure, sure. I think you might have slightly answered the next question, which was, um, do you find the -specifically the bear community to be exclusionary? In general,

36:41

H3: I would try and really see it positively and say, it is a more inclusive, it is more inclusive than exclusive. But there after surely are instances where it shows that, that people just like, ignore you, basically, or just like really? Yeah, don't give you the feeling that you are worth the same, basically as other bearish types. So this this this is this is surely a thing. That's, that's, that's, that's true. But overall, I think it's a more it's a it's it's a welcoming, gentle, friendly, cuddly, atmosphere-ish community, I think much more than then basically other communities. I guess, I would probably guess, that other communities are even harsher. You know, it when it comes to, to like, inclusion and exclusion. I think the bear community is a bit- does better than other communities in that regard, I would say.

37:52

J3: And, again, kind of answered the next question, I think, which is totally good! Um- the LGBTQ+ community do you think in general is exclusionary but also just not just the bear subgroup of the whole community? The whole rainbow the whole group of people as far as you as far as you know?

38:10

H3: Yeah, I think it's -I mean to be honest, I am not super active also in getting getting information really about like what's going on and I don't read too much gay news like to see what's what's doing what's happening on the on the on the on the fronts of gay rights, for example, worldwide, it's just not for the thing I'm too interested in. But

38:44

H3: I would say that like those, those gay communities, in general, have do have a tendency of being more in in inclusive than exclusive because they know quite well how it is to be part of a a – was heißt Randgruppe?

39:09

J3: Like, marginalized group, like a marginalized

39:13

H3: marginalized groups so they know the feeling they know how bad it can be, can be if you're if you're pushed, or if you're standing at the very corner basically of a society for so in general, I think they're more inclusive, although I also do know for sure that the that there are like, black sheeps among those people who just like really are feeling very high up nosed and very, what's the word like in the behäblich, like? *Pretentious*

39:49

H3: pretentious, pretentious yeah

39:50

H3: like really just like think of themselves as being something more special and better than others and to show show have that position to others. Like there's also those people inside those communities but want to believe that it's the minority. Yeah.

40:12

J3: Sure. Thank you. And the last question about the bear community, and then a few more, we're well over halfway there. Do you know of any language specific language labels or phrases that are unique to the bear community? So for example, I would call myself a cub, maybe sometimes a chub. That type of thing, I guess, maybe you could call them I call myself a daddy chaser so to speak. So.

40:43

H3: Totally. I mean, the thing is, I- I'm quite, I'm quite fond of, of the fact that there there are that there is a language developed around that community. I think it's really fun, *I do too actually*. But it also can be a bit I mean, can -has also its downsides, basically, if you don't, if you don't agree, basically, with what what people call, you don't want to be called like that. But in general, it's fun. And I do -I mean, there's like polar bears, and panda bears, and like, chasers and foxes and otters, I mean, this is all in my opinion, like, it's just, it's just silly. And it's, it's fun. And at first, like it does work, in my opinion, to to vaguely characterize a body type, basically. So you can can really relate to that. And I

actually also don't think it's like a discriminating thing per se. It's just like, a way to describe something for like, it may have been *positive or powerful*. Yeah, that, like, like, it happens with everything else in the world, too. Like it's just a way of funnily addressing something, and I do quite like that. Yeah, that's the language that developed around to the community.

42:20

J3: the last couple of questions, deal with community and identity in general. And so kind of interested in looking about online and offline experiences. So I'm going to ask you to think about the time when you first came out. Did you use or I guess my question, how did you kind of find a sense of community first coming up? Did you were apps a thing then or online? Maybe chat rooms? Or did you have to do things offline? So for for, for me, when I first came out, I knew very little of Growler and was introduced to it by a bearish friend. And that was really the only connection I had to any type of queer community. I see. So just okay, that's so free was strictly online. And then as I became more comfortable myself and learned it also moved offline and just met people different places.

43:10

H3: Gotcha. I mean, this this is actually I would say, you can consider yourself lucky to have at least have had at least that small, little bit. Because I'm old enough to honestly have to say that I didn't have the word of just word apps back then. And there were no like, like big communities. Like when when I realized that I basically am a gay man and I like a few years maybe afterwards, I am actually more interested in a bear side of the gay world it was only just really getting formed and started there wasn't too much going on. So yeah, I I didn't have online experiences in my early 20s, basically when I came out that they they just haven't been around.

44:08

J3: Um, can I ask were there were there any offline experiences or anything that help you to shape your identity or

44:17

H3: I mean this is a rather like, I would say, boring or romantic story I can I can just like shorten and leave here. Because me and my partner we we were our first gay partners like to each other. And we we've been living in a monogamous relationship for for the longest time, meaning for 11 years basically. So we didn't have any other didn't Have any other like occasions like we didn't search for any other gays basically or like yeah, since being monogamous also means like there was there was no need to look out for for for different partners. So yeah..

45:19

J3: That's not boring! – that's super sweet I love that. *What?* That's not boring. That's a very sweet story!

45:24

H3: Sorta is sweet, yes

45:30

J3: I guess just kind of last question out of curiosity is there anything in the bear community that outs may be outside of your relationship? Is there anything specifically in the bear or queer community that maybe helped shape identity so I guess what I'm looking for for example, *shape identity?* for for example, for me is sang with the Uni Wien Gay Men's Chorus for a semester, I didn't when I first came out, that was about it. Maybe half a year after I came, I didn't realize anything like that existed. So I guess it means to to be gay for people means different things. So some people they're just I have my partner or my friends and that's enough. For me personally, I like to march in the Regenbogen Parade every year, that's really really important for me to do. But it's it's interesting because it's there's communities within communities so there's the bear community, there's the queer community but also the chorus for example, it's -we're all gay men, that's something we share in common we're just gonna meet every Tuesday and sing and for for me to just stand up and -I mean, I would didn't coming from America this would have been I didn't really have an outing in America. That would have been the fact that I could just stand in a huge room in this -in the Festsaal and just, oh, I'm I'm admitting that I'm gay. And I'm singing in front of all these people as a gay man, it was kind of really really empowering. It didn't that activity didn't last very long *yeah* But it was it was a good experience. So anything in general...

46:58

H3: I think I, I I tried to think of that I didn't have -I didn't have like gay community experiences

47:05

J3: and that's that's totally fine too!

47:08

H3: Yeah, yeah. I'm just trying to think if that's really true if I'm forgetting something but no I haven't I haven't joined also some some some like gay groups or did something in my in my spare time I just had like like vague contact with like something gay community related over my.. [partner snoring in background. Both laugh]

47:36

J3: you're gonna have to *wake up my sleepy partner*- gonna have to poke the bear shortly! [both laugh]

47:43

H3: I shall do that. My partner is, was part, like like an initiator of the of the rainbow scouts in Austria. So I occasionally like helped out and and or attended their their barbecue events for example. So that's that's one of the only like gay community like events that I cannot think of I have joined and I just have had good experiences like being there but but I think I don't have a don't get the core basically of the question

48:26

J3: if there was anything that helped shape your your gay identity or it doesn't necessarily have to be community but

48:31

H3: yeah, what what shaped identity?

48:36

J3: like I guess for me it's just time? *Yeah*

48:39

H3: Time. Yeah. Over Over time, you get more and more comfortable basically, if you're lucky enough to live in a country where it's yeah, we you don't get killed for being gay. *that's a big plus! Crazy world!* so helped you. Also seeing that how more and more accepted it gets in the media in the news in movies and TV shows that just helped me feeling more more accepted me maybe or but but that sounds a bit over exaggerated because I've never had what I've always was lucky enough to not have problems for being gay. I do have my very own stories about like, for example towards what I experienced with my parents, but that's I guess, some some other story that doesn't need to fit here. But in general, I was had really good accepting experiences that helped me shape that helped me be a healthy gay man, I guess. Or having a gay having a positive, healthy relationship to me being gay. If that's just that's that's, I think you can say. But didn't use any communities.

50:07

J3: very nice. That concludes our interview. Is there anything else you would like to add before our interview ends or?

50:20

H3: Um -nothing particularly jumps to my mind other than I'd be very curious actually to see the results of this. *for sure* So if you if you're if you think of- think of me, maybe I will, I would gladly I'm not sure when I'm exactly gonna read it. Yeah. I'm curious to to hear about your results!

50:41

J3: For sure! I'm happy to share my thesis with you. So we'll end there. Thank you very much for your time.

50:45

H3: You're much welcome, Jeffrey

J3: Greatly appreciate it!

Interview 4

Tue, Jul 25, 2023 10:27PM • 51:01

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

bear, apps, gay, people, community, question, find, type, years, body, met, vienna, friends, slim, identity, apparently, point, twinks, fetishes, attracted

00:01

J4: So I am Jeff

00:06

J4: here with Gernot for my master's thesis interview, I will record our interview transcribe it, and after the recording of the transcription, I will delete the recording once it's transcribed. Throughout, a pseudonym will be used. So your identity is always concealed. Please feel free to say pass if you are not comfortable answering any questions. Could I ask you to please describe yourself in a few words, generally speaking, where you're from what you do age, of the like,

00:37

G4: Okay, my name is Gernot. I'm 41 years old. I'm I'm from Vienna, at least I live here. I've been living here most of my life that's why I consider myself Viennese these days. And I work in education. I used to work in higher education and do research and I'm together with my partner. Now for 19 years. *Congratulations!* Thank you. Well, what else *No that's perfect* Okay.

01:14

J4: Perfect, perfect. Okay. So the first part of the interview, I'll be looking at how interested in learning how dating apps or hookup apps in the gay world, the role they play in your life? So the first question, if you do not use any apps, I would ask you to just describe personal culture, community and experience in the gay world of your daily life. But if you do use the -reps, app. Do you use any and if so which ones?

01:48

G4: Yes, I actually use apps. And I try to like most of these I try at least once. You know, I try them out for for a couple of days or even a couple of weeks. Just to see, you know, you know what the fuss is all about? Sure. And currently the ones I'm the one I'm using the most is probably Growlr. That's like a typical bear/chub app. I also also used Gay Romeo, for for a while, actually have a couple of years, but I just recently deactivated the account I used. What else did I use? I used the biggest city for a while. I use I used Grindr for like maybe a month, I would say.

02:49

J4: That's a long time for Grindr! [both laugh]

02:54

G4: Yeah, I guess that's about it. The funny thing is the sort of all the other social media apps I use, could be considered as hook-up as well, apps as well, because you know, sometimes it's happening there as well. It's not specifically to like, who comes? Who can happen. If communication can happen, it can happen. *Yeah, exactly* Yeah, that's, I think that's all, like all I ever tried, at least. Yeah, more or less, I would say. So.

03:36

J4: When did you first start using the apps or the first app that you use, for example?

03:44

G4: The first I mean, actually, now -now I remember, like the first app I ever used, which I didn't count that because it's -I don't think there is an app for that. But there was chaseable back then. And that was a web application. *What was it called again?* Chaseable. *Chaseable*. And there was more like this. It basically works a bit like Facebook, I would say. And Facebook for -big, bigger guys and bears. And it was not. I wouldn't consider it to be a hookup app, even though that was probably part of it. But it was more like a community app, I would say, but I haven't used it in a while. I'm still getting emails like inviting me back and why don't you check up? I think they threatened me 100 times. They're going to delete my account at one point, but they apparently never did. And that's, actually had fun there! Now that I think of it. We actually met up with people I initially talked to on chaseable. But that was only web-based. I don't think they have an app. But apparently it still exists. Like I'm still getting e-mails from them. So apparently it still exists. And that was I would say in maybe 2014/15 something like this, even later? No, no, it was in 2016/17? Yeah 16/17 I would say.

05:31

J4: Very good. Um, do you notice any major differences in the apps? If so, could you describe?

05:38

G4: Differences between the specific apps or differences like over the course of time, like how they..

05:46

J4: Specifically between the app- So if one is you are targeted for different groups and others are different?

05:51

G4: I mean, definitely. That's why I keep using some and I discontinued using others, I guess. I would I still say, I would still say that Growlr is one of like, the nicer that, you know, where people are, like, friendly. And probably, I mean, not all, of course, but people have like this basic level of politeness, I would say you should say hello. And as a thank you and stuff like that, which doesn't happen a lot in other apps, you know, where you just get like short fact messages. And people even get angry with you, when you don't even consider, you know, replying to short one of those. I would say that there

is more like, a community behind that. And I'm not not really sure if that goes for -if that is -if that's what the app is all about, or if the bear community in general is kind of more relaxed and more polite and be more open to to, like more open-minded and other than other people's subconscious. *Probably*

07:08

J4: I think there's a bit of ruth to that for sure.

07:10

G4: I would say that they -Romeo's somewhere in the middle. I would say*mhm*. It's for people who, like, chat for friendship, but it's also used for since -it's a German app. And I would say it's it's rather used by by people my age, I would say because it started I think in the early 2000s. So most people like this, the gay life started probably with this app. A lot of people on the internet I think as of recently, more and more people just kept moving to Grindr. So yeah, and Gay Romeo also started as a web page, basically, the app came later so they had like this, which was considered relatively new back then, you know, this instant messaging system specifically for gay something that didn't exist, like back then. And the other apps like Grindr I personally found just horrible. It's but it's the type of communication I think that goes for a lot of apps these days. People just communicate with like, single emojis or just even just letters you know. And that's just not me, you know, short it's not the type of communication I usually have and that the neat trick there because you know, what's the what do I get out of it of this communication? Just a nuisance? Yeah.

08:44

J4:How often would you say that you use the apps?

08:47

G4: I would say daily. Yeah, I would definitely say daily because there's some people are like, with some people have just moved to you know, instant messaging, WhatsApp at one point or Instagram or something but for like some people I only chat with on, on the apps I would say *mhm* daily.

09:13

J4: Super. And if I may ask, what are your main intentions when using the apps? Would you say sexual experiences, friendship, dating, meeting new people in the community?

09:25

G4: I just checked my profile today because you know, you never do that like you rarely ever update your profile text and like on Growlr it says that I'm open to meet new people you know, friends and chats something like this and I think that was the initial reason - reason why I, why I use Chaseable as well, because not so much the sexual encounter thing, that came later, but initially it was just like, being you know, getting to know a community that I didn't know before, *sure* like short because we just never bought because most of our friends, still, I would say like a lot of friends, still straight and back then most of our friends were straight. And so we never really were part of a gay

community. So there was a starting point, I would say. But right now, to be honest, I use it for like chats. But also, of course, for for sexual encounters, you will definitely see them as a hookup app now as well. But like, it says, dating you mentioned as well, like, dating is something that the need to do, *sure* basically.

10:46

J4: Thank you very much. If I asked you to describe um maybe a specific experience or interaction on the app, can you think of anything that was maybe rather positive or rather negative that left an impact that you remember?

11:02

G4: I mean, I keep telling people that, especially with Growlr, you know, I met people on Growlr that I consider friends now. *Yeah*. And and some people we even go on holiday with. *Yeah*. So it's like, something that really developed into a friendship, you know, because the initial chat was just just interesting. And it's just yeah, I really, really enjoyed it, you know. *mhm* And it also opened up my mind to things I probably wouldn't have done before because I simply didn't know about them *sure, sure* and it's not easy to find out about this. So I would say that this is like one of the nicest things when something like a friendship develops, you know, that comes from the comes from the apps for sure. And you said about like a negative, negative...

11:58

J4: It would be just like, is there a bad experience or something that really left a sour taste in your mouth?

12:03

G4: But that only happened? Actually, it only happened with Grindr so far *ah okay, shocker*. [both laugh]. It was actually somebody I met with you know, *Oh really?* Yeah, but it was just for coffee. We just met for coffee and was quite the nice thing then and we had a nice chat and then we sort of moved to some sexting in the evening. And the next day I sent like, like a good morning message or something like this, you know? And he like immediately replied that he cannot deal with like this constant bugging and like, so you better just stop right now because he knows where this is going. And this like, just came out of the blue. We like it's just a weird and because you know usually, I have heard- how do you say that in English? and that you usually have a good insight-like stable mind

13:19

J4: A good intuition

13:21

G4: Yes, have probably like good intuition and it's yeah, this time I just failed apparently because this was just a weird person and didn't feel like that during during our chat. Yeah, but that that was one of the main the main reasons why I discontinued using Grindr, because because of that single incident, you know, simply because it didn't

happen on any of the other apps before. So maybe I just got lucky and unlucky this time but when I was...

13:53

J4: There's a lot of truth to that. Grindr's really really not nice compared to Growlr.

13:59

G4: Yeah, I mean, probably there's people that just maybe because people really see this as a hookup you want to get -get straight to the point and like you know, not about that immediately and don't want everything that comes with everything that comes with it. You know, they just want sex and nothing else so. But call me old fashioned, but I need some intimacy as well than *sure*and need a person.

14:31

J4: It's nice to have a conversation with somebody.

14:34

H4: Somebody, I can talk more than three sentences with *Sure*. If that's not part of it, so be it.

14:41

J4: Definitely, definitely. The next kind of section of questions I called body politics. *mhm* So if I were to ask how do you perceive different body types and why, so for example, it could be, How does -do you feel positively or negatively or indifferent towards -if I were to say the adjectives like hairy, fat, slim, chubby, muscular, scruffy *mhm* or just general associations or thoughts.

15:15

G4: I would say basically neutral. The thing is, like I started to come from, and I still consider myself to be part of the bear community. But apparently, my, my type somehow changed in the last couple of years, to a point where I don't apparently have a specific type anymore. It's kind of interesting that sometimes find people interesting that they wouldn't even have looked at, you know, a couple of years ago, and I kind of liked that thought, you know, that I'm not that focused anymore on a specific type. So, I mean, I still I still like, like, people that are hairy, I still rarely even look at, like, slim people, or even muscular, I think, slim, I would even consider to be more positive than muscular. I think muscular to me is like, because I always see the type of person that comes with it. And it's usually able to consider, it's just too much work, you know, I want people to be like, more relaxed and to be more, because I have a feeling that people who really have a muscular body, see their body as like, like, like something that needs constant optimization *sure, sure*. They constantly need to work on themselves. And I think that's, that's just not me. *mhm*

16:56

J4: Very good. Would you say, *mhm* is physical appearance important to you? If so, how or when?

17:05

G4: I mean, physically, somehow, I will say yes. Because, you know, especially in the apps, that's the first thing you see *sure* it's like, but also lately, I think I'm more attracted to people who show their faces or even like fully clothed people, you know, because for the longest time you only saw torsos *sure* on these apps. *or very little clothing*. Yeah. And that's, I -I just recently changed my profile picture. I don't -like, I'm fully clothed now -that's like, you know, probably normal there. And yeah, I look, probably I'm looking at faces more than they used to. So but of course, that's what attracts us first, you know, you don't know the person first. You're looking for something that you know that you find interesting about *sure* that person. But then once the conversation starts, it's it's a minor thing, and it's nothing like the person if the conversation itself is not interesting. It could be the hottest guy ever, and I still would discontinue flirting with him. *sure*

18:26

J4: Do you feel that your body is fetishized or has been fetishized? And if so, how do you feel about that?

18:36

G4: Um, Yeah, definitely, I think that's the bear community. That's just as -we would be lying to ourselves if we say okay, we don't we don't care about body type *for sure*. We just care about different body types. Than other gay communities or subcultures *definitely* do it, because they have like, yeah, they have like, *we're men, we all do it* Yes- maybe the twinkish bodies or the muscular ones and for for the gays, or for the for the bears, it's, you know, the body hair and sometimes even things that you can't, you can't do anything about, you know, you are hairy, or you're not, you know, you can't do anything about it. So I would never, like you find it from time to time that you know, bear -bears don't even look at twinks or like refuse to talk to them because they're not like their type or like them *so to speak* Yeah, exactly. And that's just as bad as what other gay cultures do you know, it's *for sure*. Not all about -not all is about you know, physical affection or something. Yes, but to answer the question, yes, definitely. There is seeing sometimes even stronger like the fetishes in the bear community, sometimes even stronger than in other gay communities, like hair, *sure* a chest might be, even more the beard *definitely* is a huge fetish. And of course, you're fetishized by other -be bears, but also especially happened on Grindr that you get messages from like, 18-year-old/ 19 year old's who are just attracted by, you know, major men that that are hairy, to be -to be honest, that's just not me. I mean, that's, I was still like, answering the things politely and say that, like, you know, I, myself, I kind of need a man with a bit more experience and *sure*.

20:48

J4: Now, um, to kind of flip the question, have you ever finished someone else's body or appearance?

20:53

G4: Yeah, definitely. I think I -Yeah, but, you know, as I said before, it's not that focused anymore. But apparently, you know, if I find somebody attractive, there must be something in his physical appearance, because I don't know anything about the person and that's fetishism. *definitely* You look at something and you find that attractive. And of course, that's, that's happening as well. Yeah, most definitely. Yeah, but it's also interesting, because also, if I compare myself to further friends, that I really don't care about ethnicity. Like, at all, that's really not a thing. And then I know, it is for a lot of gays, you know, that. Especially the bear community where where Asians, you know, Asians being like, the, probably the smooth ones, the slimmer ones, the smaller ones, and they're not like, the bearish type? *Sure, absolutely*. So I think a lot of bears don't - would even think about, you know, having something with an Asian guy. Like I had, I had hook ups with all kinds of nations, I would say.

22:20

J4: Thank you. Last question about fetishization. Do you find in general fetishization to be positive? Negative? Neutral?

22:36

G4: I would say it's kind of negative, if it's exclusive, you know. And I kind of see why, you know, we all know that the people putting on the like, you know, no Asians or no twinks. You know, we're...

22:51

J4: That's actually inspired this, my master's thesis -was the whole no fats, no femmes, no Asians, which is terrible. And why do we do this? How can we marginalize a community that's already marginalized? It's it doesn't make sense to make but...

23:02

G4: Yeah, exactly. I mean, I kind of, I kind of get I mean, you know, it's fair to say that you're not attracted to people. I personally wouldn't say it because you never know, you know, maybe there's that one Asian guy, and you all of a sudden fall for him. *sure*. You can never tell. So I would never, ever never say that myself. So but, you know, we also accepted gays say, I'm not into women, you know, we accept it because it's part of being gay. And for sure, for sure. So, of course, you're attracted to some people, and you're not attracted to other people. But why emphasize this? You know, so, why put it somewhere where everybody can see it, you know, it's like, turn this into a positive, you know, say, I'm more- I tend to be more attracted to bearded guys, or I tend to be more attracted. So don't exclude. Put it in a way where it's exclusive, you know, because some people might still be -feel included into something you find as a positive. But in general, I would say that this is this is just part of the game. You know, this is just, if you're going on a hookup app, I mean, of course, physical attraction is major part of it, because that's what these apps are based on, you know, *absolutely*. So it would be it would be an illusion to think that we could go go past this, you know, because that's just so I would, I would say probably neutral because it's just part of the game. We have to simply accept the fact that these fetishes of fetishes exist on hook up apps.

24:55

J4: Thank you. Have you personally ever experienced Discrimination on the apps?

25:06

G4: That's an interesting question. I don't think so. Actually. Only as an Austrian once *laughs* for the weirdest reason. There was this guy who apparently was Jewish, and he was like on Growlr. And he said something like, I said something like a hope you enjoy your stay. And it's quite a nice city so get to know it, and stuff like that. He said that he, he thinks that this is like, like this, there's so this, there's many nice things in the city that's full of evil or something like this. I said, what kind of evil do you mean? He was talking about- He was apparently a Jewish guy from Israel, and he says, you know, all the Nazis and the history and whatsoever. I told him, this is like long gone, you know, this is an entirely different.

26:08

J4: different world.

26:11

G4: And he sort of said this, that I have to say this as an Austrian, because, you know, he even said something like, what is it, to be a Nazi comes with our blood or something. And it was incredibly racist as well, you know, especially since it didn't know anything about my family. Surely could have easily been- come from a family that was a victim of Nazism *definitely*. Yeah, but that's something probably as as an Austrian, but never as never as a chubby bear person. But that's probably because I just surround myself with what I like. *Yeah*.

26:56

J4: Yeah, very good. If I may ask you, could you briefly describe your relationship with your body? Are you comfortable in your own skin with your appearance? Or you're not or?

27:08

G4: I would say I'm pretty comfortable with with how I look like. The thing is, though, what I -I mean, it is still a health issue. You know, we all know that as much as like looking at it. We know that like being chubby is not a healthy lifestyle *Yeah*, so I'm getting a little bit on point, I have to think about this, you know, this is something I have to do something about. Because I would say that, you know, problems are already starting. Because I don't know if it comes with age, or it comes with weight, but weight is probably part of it.

28:00

J4: Have you ever had an experience or a relationship with someone that you would consider to be not your type or your stereotypical type?

28:11

G4: Yeah, definitely, I mean, not a relationship because I've only been in like, a gay relationship, you know, long lasting gay relationship. But yeah, I definitely had encounters with people I would not consider my my specific type, but you know, the last couple of years that changed, but..

28:35

G4: I think it was, it was a twink in the sauna or something like this. It was the first time where I was kind of surprised that I -you know, that it's about about how open I was in that in that regard. When that happens the first time not so it's a common thing that I have all different types of really, really..

29:04

J4: Very nice. The next set of questions kind of deal with the bear community in general. Do you personally identify as a bear yourself? And if so, when did you start identifying as such?

29:19

G4: Yeah, I do. Look. Yeah, definitely. I do for the longest time. And the -just I think I like two years ago, I changed my Growlr profile said cub. I think I'm past that point like *yeah I'd say so too* [both laugh].

29:36

J4: Maybe you don't want to hear that. But I mean, you can, that's the beauty of the bear community to an extent you can be what you want to be.

29:44

G4: Yeah, exactly. But then again, you know, I've considered myself being part of the bear community since, I wanna say.. I really have to think about... two thousand.. sixteen -I would say, when I first said, Okay, I'm a cub, you know *mhm*, that's, that's when this started. And then um yeah, and then I became became a bear. I'm not yet at daddy point, I'm not [laughs] -this is something I don't need. [both laugh].

30:28

J4: What does it mean for you to kind of be a part of that community or to have that community? The bear community

30:40

G4: Yeah, it is, I think it is very important -that, because it shows that gays are not all alike, you know, people who go to the gym and have like, like, surgery once they turn 35. So that people can be confident with a different body type as well. And I think that's a message that should, you know, should make its way to other gay subcultures as well, personally. So that's, that's one part of it. But the other part of it is that bears usually are or they spend their spare time in the way that I usually do it as well, you know, they, like to cook, they like to go out for dinner, they like to go for walks, or maybe to the movies, *mhm* you know, they enjoy a good drink. They're not like out dancing the entire night *yeah*. It's like -that something, something I would *don't have to go to the circuit party*.

Exactly. And that's something I, I, that's something for me, I would say *sure, sure* and it's something I feel comfortable with.

31:52

J4: Thank you, kind of to maybe widen the lens, so to speak, and not just focus on the bear community as a subculture, but looking at the whole LGBTIQ+ community, do you find the queer community to be exclusionary? In general?

32:10

G4: Exclusionary? I'm afraid, I'm afraid we are I'm afraid afraid we are. The thing is, you know, we, we always, we all I mean, we're quick, when it comes to, when we feel discrimination from the outside, then we are sort of blind when we, when we see it on the inside. And I think that, especially you know, that some gays can be really harsh when they, when they -when they show others that, you know, they're not their type or they don't want to do anything with them. And I think the, the apps just increased the problem rather than decreased it in a *for sure*, because communication happens so fast on there, you know, and I think if you are like, part of the, of a group that's already, you know, sort of a minority in the gay community, I think that you are that you deal with problems pretty quickly. And I remember an Asian friend of mine, that he really got, like hate messages, you know, *that's horrible* and people he didn't even reached out, you know, he himself that just -just -just sends on, sends him a hate message, you know, and that's something like, even to for this people. Even that the fact that they feel entitled to do this tells us something about this community in general and because apparently, they think that it's just a normal thing to do. And that's something we need to address, I guess.

34:15

J4: For sure, if you have nothing else better to do than to bring somebody else down for literally no reason *yeah*, you need get your priorities straight check yourself. So..

34:23

G4: Yeah, but we are quite quick when it comes to you know, like trans rights and, you know, asking everybody you know, the the is it heteronormative in English as well? *yes* world to be like more open-minded and to be more accepting where, you know, we, we, we demand equality on the outside, but we we don't work towards equality on the inside, in the gay community, and that's kind of sad, I would say.

34:55

J4: Agreed. We're- there's definitely work to be done.

34:57

G4: You know, especially the ga- the bear community probably love not the "Bear Bear", but more like, you know, the scruffy more muscular bears who um, like..

35:08

J4: Who like maybe have it a little bit easier?

35:12

G4: I think, I think they're quite exclusive when it comes to people who are not, who don't look as masculine as they want people, *yeah for sure* because they also they asked for, for others to to, to fulfill that cliché of masculinity that they have in their own mind and in everything that kind of looks feminine to them is something bad. Which I personally is, I mean, you know, I've seen the most sexist men. The most sexist men are probably the gays, it's not the straight men, it's the gays. You know, I've heard things in the gay world, or gay men talking about women, which no straight men will probably ever do, you know, because and that's what I meant. We asked for other, we ask other people to like, be more open minded to be more inclusive, and we tend to not follow our own, for sure.

36:24

J4: Last of the bearish questions, do you know of any specific labels, language or phrases that are unique to the bear community? So for example, I would identify myself as a cub. Sometimes a chub, maybe even sometimes a daddy chaser so to speak, we have all these different labels. Can you think of? Anything that comes to mind? Or maybe phrase, language? phrases or language? Sorry.

36:52

G4: I mean, there's, there's there's lots of them. I mean, there's otters there is, there is panda bears, there's chasers, There is um. What else do we have? Of course, there's bears. There's muscle bears. There's polar bears. There's daddies. None of them are quite -they all sound a bit savage, right? [both laugh] It's all like, the entire animal kingdom but.. That's only about the bear community. Right? *Yeah. Yeah, yeah*. I think that's all I know.

37:41

J4: Very good. So we're at the very end of our interview, the last few questions will deal with kind of community identity. And I'm interested in kind of finding, finding out if you find identity, online versus offline or both. So if I could ask you to go back to when you yourself first came out or first identified as gay. Maybe How did you meet other gay men or find a sense of community was it was there a chance for it to be done digitally was only done offline, or, I mean.

38:22

G4: Um, like, in the beginning, I didn't even know. That's a bit of a, I mean, my partner, the partner I have now we basically came out together, because in the beginning, we both didn't know, even of each other, that we were kind of attracted to each other. And I was with a woman back then, and we've been together we had together for like, six years, so quite a long time. And I always knew that I could also fall for a man, you know *mhm* I'm sort of attracted to men as well. But still, I didn't consider myself to be gay, and I'm still usually telling people I'm gay, just because it's the easier option because even myself, I don't need to, like, it's the easier label *sure, sure* I would say. It's just, I don't really care, you know, because I always keep telling people, at the end of

the day, it's just words, you know, and *definitely, definitely*, those words can have different meanings for different people. So even if we say, use the word gay, doesn't mean the same for everyone, you know, *definitely* What does gay mean?, you know, and sorry, what was the question?

39:40

J4: The -how you kind of maybe find -found a sense of community or other gay men, queer people when you first came out if that was done offline online.

39:50

G4: Yep, we -sort of discovered that together. And that was, that was kind of interesting. And I think for -in the beginning, it was just enough to have each other, you know, we didn't need any other community, I would say because we had, we had great straight friends that, like, you know, it was just, it was just unnecessary to have that that kind of community. And but there's one point we just felt like there could be a curious what what is out there? You know, that's when we started to, to like open up and get to know other people.

40:38

J4: Very good. the next question is kind of -you kind of answered it. But if you use the apps when you first came out did you start -trying to reformulate that a little bit. I guess in addition to apps, or maybe your current experiences with the apps even. So I guess, both offline and online? How do you find a sense of community? Or currently? Or how did you find a sense of community? And what are some other ways that you can maybe imagine meeting other gay men?

41:14

G4: Apart from the apps?

41:17

J4: Via the apps or apart from the apps.

41:21

G4: I mean, I was I was even, I mean, even had an idea before, you know, before the whole COVID thing. I always wanted to have a bear cooking club. *I love that!*, you know, it's something like the books -like a book club, you know, when people read a book in advance and and discuss it, they're never thinking, why not prepare something in advance and then come up, like, you know, you'd prepare dessert, and I prepare like a main course. And then everybody tastes it, like, there's three people, so a couple of people meeting, and like three of them, like, prepare something to cook together. And I would actually love to have something like this, because the especially the bear community, I mean, I don't know if you know, that. That it used to be much bigger. In Vienna, there used to be like, several institutions, organizations, that sort of, you know, and it's stopped at one point, you know, and all we have now is like, weekly bear sauna thing, and, and then a monthly clubbing, you know, that's, that's about it. And I would really love to have some some kind of social events, you know, because I think we need

something like this, rather than yet another app or yet another, yet another party, I think. Because I've come across a lot of people who say, okay, they can't find, they can't find love on these apps. And they kind of want that, you know, because I think they're just not intended to find love, you know, that *it's really, really hard*. Yeah, exactly. But that's, that's not, - what I mean. Yeah, I think, I mean, I can't think of ways how that would actually work. You know, I think the people who really find a partner online and fall in love it, I think it's more the exception than the rule.

43:41

J4: For sure. And I think a lot of luck, to be honest.

43:45

G4: So I think we need more like social events, rather than just parties and everything.. especially for the bear community would be nice. And there used to be like this, the Wiener Runde, which used to be a bear organization, they had like, stuff, like, going for hiking trips together and stuff like that, or going to museums, even just going to museum together, you know, have a group experience and like, I don't know, people are like, I find it kind of sad that this just disappeared, you know that we don't have that anymore.

44:21

For sure. That's actually really comforting to know, I was talking with a couple of queer friends, guys, girls, non-binary people, and I'm very, very grateful that I have my kind of queer core family. We're all different people, different body types, different, you know, subcultures, but I kind of -I think you hit the nail on the head. We're kind of lacking in the bear community. It's like how do I meet people that's just not at the bar just not on Growlr, so to speak, and my partner in the States. He had a- in his hometown of Akron. There was a bear club that unfortunately just kind of disbanded the times were hard and didn't have enough money, but he told me about bear runs which you go camping and go to different events and have different events. And I'm like, that's really cool. Why is there nothing like that here?*mhm* Maybe It exists in Europe for sure. I think there's some in Germany and I know, Cologne is kind of the unofficial bear capital of Germany/Europe. So it's, it's nice to know that exist, but it'd be cool to bring it to the back to Vienna. So

45:17

G4: I mean, what they call now bear weeks in other parts of Europe, we used to have that in Vienna. *Oh, really?* Yeah, Yeah. Used to be they call the bear conference. And I'm not kidding, *I kind of love that* [both laugh] we really had like talks and stuff like that. So they really tried to do something for the community as well. And it's kind of sad that we don't have that anymore, you know? *Definitely, definitely*.

45:44

J4: So last question or two. And again, just kind of reformulating. It is, the question is, did apps help you mold your identity? Or if not, what did help you shape or mold your gay and bear identity. So just as an example, from my personal experience, so I came out in Vienna and didn't even realize that the bear community was a thing and then kind

of had a friend take me under his wing and introduced me to Growlr. And I'm like this is really cool. There's people like me, I don't have to look like X, I can look like Y and that's completely acceptable. So I guess, for me specifically, in this, you know, we're different times and partially different generations, but I think, for me, I kind of definitely found identity and community and everything online. And then as I was out longer and became more comfortable, oh, there's Savoy or oh, let's go march at pride, I kind of found more offline things. So I was lucky to have I guess, you know, initially online and then the best of both worlds after over a period of time. So.

46:48

G4: Yeah, I think it was the same for me as well. You know, I did some -I don't know too much about the apps. But of course, I did some research online, you know, found several communities. And one of the first things we actually did, like my partner and I, together, was this, this bear nudist camp in Spain, where there was like, this bear community and they rented I think with like, different little bungalows, and it was just, it was just nice, you know, there were like maybe 40 Bears. And they had like, all the meals together, and one of them was cooking was like, 40 bears sitting and having dinner together and stuff like that. So it was it was actually was pretty nice to have that. But I only found out about that because I was on Growlr. *sure*. Like I would have never known that it existed if it wasn't for Growlr. *Yeah, definitely. That goes for other -for other things as well, that I didn't know before. But then again, the most people that I met in the bear community, like that are friends now I met at events, you know *sure* I didn't meet online and met like in person, you know, and like, spoke to in person and so yeah, that was like, can you read the question once more?

48:27

J4: What -What helped you kind of get into your bear identity or your gay identity? What helped shape that?

48:33

G4: Yeah, I would say that. The, I would say that I definitely didn't know that there is you know, because as a young man, I was I was always sort of attracted to, to older men. - Um that sort of changed, you know, and I can clearly see with my partner with like, the same age as me. This was more like a fetish thing. It was not an actual thing that, you know, that prevented me from like, having the relationship with him *sure, sure*. It just, yeah, but I'm definitely happy to know that there's others out there who like have feel the same way or a community that is like when coming to *sure*. That definitely helped, you know, but then again, I was, as said, I was quite active in the queer scouts here in Austria. And it was kind of cool, because we did like, you know, once I once counted, like we did like 150 workshops with with teenagers and adults like leaders, and *that's awesome!* But the cool thing was that we had just that we were such a diverse group. You know, the trainers themselves were like, you know, they came from in different parts of the gay community still, we still work together. So I think we gave the kids and teenagers a pretty good impression that gay life is not just, you know, slim guys partying. *yeah for sure*

50:16

J4: Like, there's a lot more to it than just that, so

50:18

G4: I was quite happy that it could otherwise have to develop an identity as well, *for sure, for sure*

50:29

J4: Before we end our interview, that would be the last question. Is there anything you would like to add or touch base on?

50:36

G4: No, no. I think I talked quite a lot. Well, I think the thing is, though, it's a good thing that we sort of do research on this topic as well. You know, it just that- let's hope something good comes out of this right?

50:53

J4: For sure. Sure. Fingers crossed. Thank you very kindly for your help and for your time!

G4: You're welcome.

Interview 5

Tue, Jul 25, 2023 10:37PM • 30:08

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, apps, community, gay, good, met, experience, labels, general, queer community, queer, grinder, body, identity, lesbian, short, feel, interview, day, bad

00:01

J5: Very good. So, I am Jeffrey Janus writing my master's thesis and I am here with Pedro. I will record the interview, transcribe it, it will be deleted, the transcription will be deleted, or the sorry, the recording will be deleted after I transcribe it. A pseudonym will also be used to conceal your identity when writing the research report. If there's any question or topic that makes you uncomfortable, please feel free to say pass, you don't have to answer it. As an introduction, could I ask you to say a few words about yourself name, age where you're from what you do for example?

00:42

P5: Yeah, I'm from Spain. I'm studying here. Geography. Well- Cartography a university master. Jeff, you know me already. Yeah, I don't know about this. What about me? I mean, I'm a really normal person. Nothing special I would say. *Are you though?* [Both laugh] Yeah. Yeah.

01:07

J5: Perfect. Thank you kindly. Um the first section will be a little bit shorter questions, then you'll have time to answer longer questions more freely through the interview. The first section will be an overview of gay dating/hookups. [coughs] Excuse me hookup apps. If I can ask, do you use hookup or gay dating apps? Presently, currently?

01:34

P5: Yeah, I mean, not every day or something. But I use from time to time, more or less. And I use um Grindr mostly. And I used before so Scruff Yeah, I think this was it.

01:50

J5: Just Grindr and Scruff?

01:52

P5: Yeah, I think it just just those two ones, yeah.

01:56

J5: Very good. Do you know about when you first started using the apps either here or age or?

02:02

P5: So I start actually here. I never tried it before I mean, because I didn't want to, I mean, the apps without anyone recognize me or something. Something weird but yeah. And I started to use them here in Vienna I live here three years or something like that.

02:29

J5: So more so in Vienna than in Spain?

02:31

P5: In Spain never, no.

02:35

J5: Very good. Would you say that you notice any major differences between scruff and Grindr or are they about the same?

02:43

P5: Yeah, I will say is, there's differences I will say it I mean right is not the worse world that people also sometimes says that's really bad place -I don't think so. I will say the Grindr and there is or there are people from every kind of yeah sociality- in this society in general. I mean, even more in different ways. And there are like nice people not so nice people. Kind of intelligence kind of not so much. Is kind of I mean, that's why sometimes the people are more well, sometimes we can find more unfriendly people I will say because everything from everything. And Scruff I will say it's more friendly, is friendlier. I was the other one because the profile of the people are maybe more specific. And that's why people are friendlier there it's my opinion. Yeah, I mean there could be that it's easier to have a conversation in Scruff. I mean, than in Grindr Maybe a good one.

04:08

J5: Easier on Scruff than Grindr?

04:12

P5: My opinion. In my experience yes.

04:16

J5: Thank you for sharing the experience very much. How often would you say you use the apps? Roughly I know you said not every day but

04:24

P5: No, The last thing not so many, I mean not so much, but maybe I open it one a week or each two weeks or three weeks. Now not so much you know maybe at times I use more, mostly just to get insight on what what is happening.

04:48

J5: What is happening, yeah.

04:55

J5: If I may ask what are your main intentions when using the apps? Would you say for sexual experience? Friendship, dating, meeting new people in the community?

05:03

P5: Umm, with a bit of everything. But would say sometimes more having conversation with people. Sometimes yeah, when there is someone who is like, interesting. And also, I have some attraction with these people of course I meet them. And after that, let's see, I mean, it's like not always like using it in a way to have directly something sexual I mean. But yeah also sometimes it's just checking what kind of people are there? *Sure, yes* when I'm bored.

05:45

J5: Thank you very much for that. couple of last questions, specifically on the overview of the apps.

05:54

J5: If I could ask you to describe your experiences and your interactions with others on the apps, would you say that they're positive or negative?

06:01

J5: negative? Or do you have a specific example of anything in general?

06:07

P5: I have in general good experiences I would say yeah. I mean I'm not a person who met really fast someone, I mean in the apps. I need to have a conversation before maybe some days talking with someone and then I've -when I feel confident or something I met people that normally should work with this person in a way that I had a good meet or something I met with someone and it's a good experience in a way to try coffee or beer should be not having sex in a way... And this is nice, but of course they - had some not bad bad experience at all. But for example, one time was a guy who was saying why are you not talking to me? Yeah, like doing this kind of commentary I know. *Being accusing?* Yeah, like accusing me of because of I don't know why are you talking not with me but just with my friend because your was I was with my friend and he was talking with my friend and you will never respond to me about what I asked you for and this kind of thing and yeah, I don't know like being mad with you with me. I something that I felt, I mean, not so good. Because it's why I'm reading this kind of shit. I don't know you.

07:34

J5: Sure- Yeah. It's very uncool.

07:35

P5: And we have nothing we don't know each other and that's why you're just so bad with me. Yeah, this kind of thing maybe. But nothing really big -because I tried to avoid this people I mean, sometimes they just appear *sure* yes. Yeah. I don't like this kind of people who makes me feel bad or something. I think was just one time this kind of

sometimes it's more people in this way but not so bad. But I met this guy that in the end I blocked him because I in the end I was like I don't want to talk with you. Let me alone. Yeah.

08:17

J5: Yeah, people can be unpleasant sometimes unfortunately. Um, the next section I will kind of call body politics, so it just deals with or it discusses kind of different body types in the community and opinions. So for example, the first question is how do you personally perceive or view different body types? So for example, if any of these words if I were to say hairy or fat or slim, chubby, muscular, scruffy, what comes to mind or any emotions or thoughts or feelings?

08:55

P5: I will say something -something in a way bad because it's like I'm not a person. I'm just yeah, *a label* yeah, a label, exactly- it's like, but I understand sometimes -yeah, there is people who are really -they want some thinness specially- is not good or well it's not it's not really bad thing but not great. And that can help in a way for these people who are really picky in this way to to know what exactly they are. They are going to find. I don't like this thing because for me in general is not too important these kinds of labels. I mean, for me, it is of course I have preferences between yeah if someone is handsome or not, or something *sure*, but no, I don't like these labels.

09:54

J5: The fine details aren't as important.

09:55

P5: For me, are not a thing, no. I mean, no, it's more like, Okay, you are cute or not. It's just a thing. And that's it. Yeah, but not these kinds of things. No, I don't like, I don't like so much.

10:11

J5: Thank you. Would you say that you personally is your? Is it for your personal opinion? Is physical appearance important to you? Why or why not? But you kind of answered that. But..

10:26

P5: Yeah, well, I guess that's a little bit different than the labels. It depends. Yeah, yes. But I mean, always, I think it's important the physical is always not. I wouldn't talk. I mean, in this apps with someone who has not a picture, because of I don't know, who are you. How is your appearance? Of course, maybe have one kind of yeah I like someone. And I think that you are cute that you are handsome or whatever. Or maybe it's not the most handsome man or something. But for me, maybe it's for me. I like him maybe. *sure* in a way. And that's yeah, I mean, it's kind of thing. Not the most important thing. But yeah, of course has an importance.

11:17

J5: There's a level of importance, but it's not the most important thing? *Yeah, definitely*. Sure.

11:21

P5: Yeah, I need an attraction from these people. I mean, some.

11:26

J5: Yeah. Right. I mean, we're, we're attracted to what we're attracted to, but it helps to have a spark to talk to someone who of course. Would you or do you personally feel that your body is fetishized in the community or on the apps or in general?

11:41

P5: I don't know. No. Don't think so. I would say, sometimes when I say I'm from Spain, could be like, Ah, you're from Spain. And that could be like, *yeah*, you are from hot Spain or something. Because it like -I don't know could be this way. And then my body I don't know.

12:11

J5: On the flip side of the question, have you ever fetishized someone else's appearance or their body?

12:20

P5: Not really. I mean, I can I think someone is hot and has this type of body or something? And maybe but not like a fit -a fetish? It's more like yeah, I think you're hot.

12:38

J5: And just in general, do you think the concept of fetish, fetishization -is it a positive thing a negative thing, neutral?

12:46

P5: I think depends how you apply that, I mean, if both are in this mood or you are playing or as it is role, or something could be okay. I mean if both are happy with that is fine. But not using someone like an object or something is not good because it's like, you don't like me, you like that I'm really hairy or something? No, but you both are both people are like agree. Agreed with that. Then of course it's fine. It's really, I would say neutral.

13:27

J5: Depending on the situation. Have you personally experienced any type of discrimination on the apps would you say or?

13:37

P5: Mmm. I don't think so. I'm thinking about it, but

13:44

J5: It -that's -that's that's a good thing! We'll leave it like that! Hopefully! Knock on wood!

[Knocks on wood] [both laugh]

13:49

P5: I don't think so. No, no, no.

13:53

J5: If I asked you to maybe briefly describe your relationship with your body would you say, is it a positive thing? Are you happy or content or?

14:01

P5: I am now happy with my body. Um, I was, um for years before, I was not because I was really skinny and I don't like to be like the skinny boy like everyone. Yeah, of course it's not the worst thing ever or something but it was for me like an issue and I had some I had issue that I'm really skinny. I don't like it. Yeah, yeah, I'm no, now I'm happy. I'm happy with my body.

14:31

J5: Happy to hear that! It's a journey for everybody, for sure. Would you say that you've ever had an experience or were in a relationship with someone that you would traditionally consider to be not your type?

14:51

P5: In the way of the personality or just.

14:57

J5: Anything could be personality could be physical can be..

15:04

P5: I don't know. Yeah could be, I mean some good with I had some bad experience not really bad but like a relation not a relation- something sexual with someone when I tried I tried to have something because I was trying maybe actually I didn't have a really didn't like him and was like, okay what I'm doing here? Or something. But yeah, was not too big deal.

15:41

J5: Very good thank you. the next section's kind of community identity again partially on the bear community but it can be any subculture part of the community you identify with? Would you consider yourself as a bear?

16:02

P5: No, definitely not! *Definitely not. Okay*. [both laugh].

16:04

J5: Are there any subcultures that you belong to? or are interested in, in the queer community? So?

16:12

P5: Um- actually, I have no idea.

16:14

J5: That's honest answer.

16:16

P5: I have no idea what it can what could Yeah, in which community could fit as a no, I have no idea how to identify myself there. In the community will be don't know.

16:33

J5: Making it just a little bit broader. Looking at the whole rainbow, the whole LGBTQ+ community? How do you- what does it mean to you to be part of the queer community? For example?

16:47

P5: Yeah, that's true. Yeah. I mean,

16:50

J5: So no, just in general, not so much on a subculture.

16:53

P5: Yeah. In the LGBTQ Community- Yes, of course. I mean, I feel that I'm. I like to be in the community maybe. Yeah, I could be the people could be sometimes I don't know. Look at me like a straight man. Maybe could be but I don't know. It's also cool when someone says yeah ,you're gay. Yeah. [both laugh]. It's a compliment, actually. Yeah, yeah.

17:23

J5: Very good. In general, do you find the queer/ LGBTQ+ community to be exclusionary? The people in it, or?

17:35

P5: Yeah, depends on the group of the people -I would say there is. You can see that sometimes in parties or something, in this case for example, when we went last weekend to Grelle Forelle, for example. And with we saw there are a lot of people from Grindr and other apps. And some of them you see, what kind of people they are sometimes because they are -they are they look the same, exactly the same as your types. And if you don't look, you don't look like them? You are -they are not looking at you as they pass it away like you don't exist. And this kind of people maybe yes, in general. Not I mean, many more in the apps that in the in the real life. The people are friendlier than normally in life. In real life. In Internet, in the apps people can be rude because they have something in the middle they have a Handy or a computer or they are not.

18:48

J5: It's Yeah, not that it's easier, but it's when there's -the technology makes it easier to hide behind. So you *yeah, exactly*. People feel the need to be an asshole *yeah, for sure*. It's less genuine than face to face. And yeah, for sure. *Definitely*

19:00

P5: People mean in life. I mean, when you met people that are not so rude, I would say. But of course there was people also that discriminate others. Yeah, *sure*. Yeah, of course. Yeah. I think so. Also, I will say, and I know people I mean, gay people who also only met gay people. So gay men, I want to say gay men. just wants to be with gay men and not with lesbian, not with trans and they have. They have no interest in the other parts of the communities like -I don't give a shit. I'm here and that's it. *Unfortunately, there's a lot of truth in that* and I saw that and also less because I don't know so many but also happens sometimes with this lesbian community. There is, of course some of these girls when you are in this space with this lesbian community, I would say they are sometimes looking at you like, what are you doing here? or something. I mean, in the both. *It goes both ways, in both directions* In the both ways. And that's not good. I mean, they get okay, we are in the same community, we need to be together *sure, sure*, and mostly are friendly. And in both communities, I mean in both groups, but sometimes these kind of people are sometimes not so nice. But it's fine. It's not them. It's not generally,

20:30

J5: Yeah, generally, speaking the community is pretty okay. But there that can be there's definitely room for improvement. And yeah, there are the not as nice people. Unfortunately, it's and I think in every community, it's not just not just us *exactly*, but it's part of it, unfortunately. So we're to the last section of the interview. I guess I'm curious if you're comfortable sharing a little bit about when you first came out. So for me personally, my experience was in terms of finding community. I didn't really come out in Ohio, where I'm from, I came out and did a little bit that came out really, truly in Vienna. And really only met people via the apps via Grindr initially. And then a kind of bearish acquaintance from the states recommended Growler. And then I found that and kind of met a person that kind of introduced me to the bear community and was a mentor, so to speak, it was a really nice person was a good experience. Because it's just completely felt lost. I'm

21:32

J5: Like, wait, I'm a bigger person. I don't look like the guy on the Abercrombie bag. There's place for me in the in the community, which is sad to say, but truly, it was-

21:39

J5: it was a comforting feeling, to know that there's a place of belonging. But for me, I don't think I would have went to a gay bar to meet people. So I think exclusively my experience was- identity and community was via the apps. Was it similar for you or different, or?

21:59

P5: I use the apps really late, I mean, when I moved here, I had the luck. I mean, when I moved to Germany, I met people from the community and it was like, really random, but I had a German course. And I met, Alesh, is one of my friends, my best friends. He was openly gay. And after that, I met another another girl who was bisexual, and then Lea a lesbian, and was like, the way that most of the best, I mean, friends there -were part of the community and that's why for me, it was easier and yeah, to say I'm I'm too also from the community. Yeah, it was, was good. It was a good feeling. I mean, was really natural in this way. I had this good experience.

22:58

J5: That's a beautiful story. Yeah, so a lot of it is random luck, so to speak.

23:01

P5: And it was really excited because was in this time, at the end, at the beginning, I was so relaxed, because there was like, I am also but I didn't want to say in this moment, and I try to talk about avoid something that came out of it. But at the end was really easy. And I need to say that I'm also gay. And it was like, okay, yeah, another one. [laughs]. Yeah, it was really easy at the end, because that was -the problem was me.

23:33

J5: Sure.

23:34

P5: I need the time to say, I am gay

23:42

J5: Thank you. So you said that you kind of discovered or used the apps a little bit later on? Is there anything specific that you could recount a just in general that maybe helped shape your queer identity or your gay identity? * I don't understand, sorry*. Is there anything that in -so, so is there anything that helped make you comfortable with being gay or realize that you're gay? Or I guess that's so the *in this moment you mean, or*? When you when you first came out. So I guess the apps kind of played a role in that because like, oh, there's a bear community I didn't realize that so that's and also just from me being in the city that's it's much easier to exist as a queer person in a city versus in the country.

24:35

P5: For me, I mean, was yeah, it was -I was in a city -was not open to the anything in general because Dresden was not too open. So differences in between I mean, when you are different to the normal was not so easy. I will say that, but in our community was good because I was in this club, a bit alternative, also a lot of queer people inside and also, we met more, can have different lesbian, bisexual. Also gay. That was the diversity. I mean, was not a stereotype people from the community was a bit from everything. And that's why ok, I feel if it got here because everyone is different. But it's not just what you see in TV or something. *Sure* Yeah, that's why I felt really good

there. And that's why yeah, I think that there was like, I think was a bubble actually, because was not a good city to be gay. It was not Berlin. Berlin is like everything. And you see everything there. Are you short, yeah, there is everything. *if you can think of it, it exists* Yeah. And that's like, okay. And in Dresden was like a small bubble, I would say, but it was a really good one. Because I didn't know it was like, my friend Alesh. I mean, the second day I met him, he said, I'm living with my boyfriend. I was oh nice. And they were, I mean, I saw different kinds of people who was part of the community. I saw the differences that can be made, because in my town, I'm from a small town, you have no references there. *Sure, sure*. Yeah. What do you say the internet and everything? Yeah, but you then never, I never met these people. I was like, Yeah, okay, maybe in a big city, but not here. And when I met all these people in Germany was like, Oh, I like it. I feel good. is cooler than maybe the hetero. *Yeah. So I felt the exact same way when moved to Vienna. So I get it*. Not better, but more I think for example, comfortable we have also some, of course, heteros in our group, but they were really open in the way that we say, okay, there's just one club. Which is gay. In Dresden. We want to go there. Okay, we go together. And they were also with us and was really, actually friendly. Really nice from them. That also Okay, when we got together, there was fine. I mean, this this support also for our hetero friends. To see that was was good.

27:45

J5: Very good. Very nice. I have only one more question. I realized I forgot to ask you something I'm community based, which means we're still talking about the communities what's fine. Is there any specific language or phrases that are unique to the queer community that you could think of or like slang terms or

28:10

P5: What do you mean?

28:16

J5: In the queer community in general? Are there any? So I guess, for example, twink. Hunk, are there any labels like that? Are there any maybe catch phrases or just language that we use that's unique and specific to the queer or the gay community that you that well comes to your mind that are maybe interesting to you, or

28:36

P5: Well, I think sometimes I discover sometimes new words in the community *yeah*, because it's like, wow, everything is like, really a language *yeah*. And it's all fun. And I'm, sometimes I use, I use it more in in the funny way. I mean, not to laugh from someone and something like internal language, or jokes about what you're wearing. Yeah, this twink or this bear or whatever. But it's more like, also to laugh about stereotypes sometimes. Like, yeah, I think it's funny. Yeah, I think it's really interesting. How a specific could be that the labels sometimes in the community, like a mix of twink and muscle or whatever it is pretty weird. Labels like wow, okay. This is like a menu in a restaurant sometimes. [both laugh} Okay, yeah. Yeah.

29:46

J5: Very good. Um, I think that's the the end of the interview. Is there anything you would like to add before we end the interview or?

29:56

P5: No, thank you. Thank you Jeff

29:57

J5: Thank you very much for your help and time, Pedro. I will let you know how it turns out. Thank you.

You're welcome.

Interview 6

Tue, Jul 25, 2023 10:12PM • 28:34

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

gay, apps, person, community, eurovision song contest, meet, annoying, recognize, dating apps, discrimination, bodybuilders, event, body, bit, fetish, bear, hamburg, growler, sex, twink

00:22

J6, so today I am here with Moritz thank you for taking the time to interview!

00:44

J6: Um- so can I ask you a few words to introduce yourself? Where are you from? What do you do?

00:49

M6: Okay. My name is Moritz. I'm from Hamburg, Germany, and also in Germany. And I live since February last year in Vienna. I worked 25 years for Lufthansa. And now I'm working for Caritas. In Vienna. *Very nice*.

01:07

J6: And the first section, so also just a bit about me, you know, doing my master's studies and Gender Studies, interviewing the bear community, that's kind of the main focus of my research. *mhm*. Also interested in how bears use apps and how identity is shaped through dating apps. So the first section of the interview, if I may ask, Do you use any of the day or days? I queer dating apps? So?

01:38

M6: I, I did, but I don't do it anymore. *Okay*. Well, I have some, I have a profile or some profiles, but I'm what I've already said, I don't use it anymore. Because it's, I'm, I don't like it. It's, it's very it's very, I think it's, I think it's not a good way to interact with people. It's.

02:19

J6: Um- in that regard, if I might ask you, since you do not use the apps, what do you... How do you experience gay culture or community or experiences?

02:30

M6: Well, well, I have to, I think, it's, I think I should start, I should start, I should start with the with the, with the beginning of my, my sitch- to explain why I don't use two apps. Well, I had a very late while, I knew for a long time that I'm gay, but I had a very late coming out. It was not before 2001 [partner asks in background] *When you were what age*?

03:13

M6: It was, like, well, it was 30s and..

03:26

M6: At the beginning, I I I went to a kind of gay Information Center in Hamburg and I had been- I contacted this information service no, this kind of institution to help gay people. So -and I had a special group who went to gay bars and gay clubs, with people who were interested to see to get an approach to it. And so I learned, I met some people, and we stayed in contact for a longer time, and I went to to gay bars or sex clubs or anything like that. And I started then to use Gay, Gay Romeo for example, in 2001 or 2002. And I, I met I met some guys from this with over this app, but I recognized that it's it's not my type how I met people are how can I meet people? It's a very it's a very fast way to meet people and to have sex with with other people. But that is not my type. I prefer to know a person personally, or to don't know him at all. And when you go, it's, it's very hard to explain in English. And for me, it's, it's an app. When when I use an app, it's it's not. It's not my way to meet other people. And I prefer to, of course, I have a profile on Growlr. But I'm not interested and looking onto Growlr and see who is in town who's standing next to me. I don't want to know that I am more the person who requires you want to get to know the person in this situation.

06:10

J6: Very good. If I may ask, are there queer events or gay events that you go to meet people or circle of friends/ friends through your partner?

06:19

M6: Well, it's so that in Hamburg, I went to several gay events, or I traveled to Berlin for pride or for Folsom weekend or to the leather weekend in, in Berlin. And I was for example, at gay pride in Manchester and in Cologne, also, and it was fun. Yeah. But since then, I had been to Vienna together with my partner. And when we when I moved to Vienna, I'm not such a person, a kind of person who has to go to, to, to a party event or something like that. Except when you take Eurovision as a gay event also, I had been to several Eurovision Song Contest events! *I enjoy up watching it very much*

07:31

J6: Yeah, it was- I watched it last night, for sure not a party but still.
[Partner in the background] *We're still very upset* Oh yeah, we'll talk about that after the interview!

07:36

M6: Well, very well, I will talk about that as well. I well, Eurovision Song Contest is not a gay event. It's more a situation where you meet where you can meet a lot of gay people, but it's not a gay event. And many gays mix it up for that.

08:03

[partner in background] *Jeff asked us about our friends, who are friends, whether our friends are gay or not* yeah, our friends are mostly gay, here in Vienna. And I don't need these kinds of apps. But I have to say that my partner, he -he knows when he gets to know many people via these apps. But I don't use.

08:35

J6: Different approaches work for different people.

08:39

M6: Yeah. And well, it's, it's good that they are such apps. But I think the times where you had to go to a bar or to a restaurant or something like that was better than the way to get to know a person via app is not as good as I would say. *I can imagine that!*

09:02

M6: ..for sure. sort of.

09:05

[partner in background] *check that your recording is working*

09:07

J6: Yep. We're good. I've had so many experiences where it hasn't.* Yeah you've done this more than I have! *Oh, yeah, that's that's that's I know, I know it! I've done this a lot.*

09:16

M6: I think when I just look on the -on the paper, and I see I'm not a person who's talking about much about my sexual habits or fetishes. So on the on the apps because I think that's for me, a sex fun thing, which is a result of situation. I'm not a person who, who -who faced. I have these imaginations. That is what I want. and meet a person and do it. I prefer to do it the way that it happens to the -in, in normal days life -to happen naturally, yep.

10:24

M6: And it's interesting, because we're meeting as I look up, meeting new people, I met a lot of people not in the gay community but in another community via a forum in the internet. And I love that. But that has not. It's not in connection with your sexuality. But the joke is that this forum, when when I recognize when I was on the phone, that many people who are there are gays. But it's not , it wasn'tm -It was gays against bits, which is a forum about the bits of Olympic Games *okay*. And it's funny when you when you recognize, I was very astonished that, let's say 80% of the people who were in this forum, were gay, or are gay. And we met, but it was not, in the sense to meet sex partners. And that is the same as Eurovision in the way No, it's more like another way of Pride event.

11:42

J6: Mhm! Thank you very much for sharing this. Also, I forgot to say at the very, very beginning if there's anything that makes you uncomfortable, and you don't want to answer you're welcome to say pass at any point.

11:53

M6: So yeah, but I know that

11:59

J6: The next section we'll move on to is body politics. *Yeah* So if I may ask, how do you personally perceive different body types? So if someone were to use the words hair, fat, slim, chubby, muscular, scruffy. Do you feel positively negatively indifferent? *That is, it's a good question*.

12:23

M6: I well, I have a kind of fetish body-wise and I'm absolutely into bodybuilding. *Okay!* And absolutely no, it's that is a fetish which I got when I was a little kid. It started with I laughed. I love to read comics from Superman or Batman or different superheroes and I even draw I like I like to draw the costumes with the with the skintight costumes and but it was not

13:26

M6: It's I really like bodybuilders when they are not in competition.

13:39

J6: How you can say that a body will focus on the contests and when they are there is a competition shape and there's a lot of competition shape and I prefer the people who are not in competition. *Okay*, shape which is more bulky and more stämmig. Stämmig? *stocky*. Stocky, Yeah. And and

14:27

M6: -and then I recognized that bodybuilders, the people, their character doesn't fit with my expectation of a partnership or something like that. And so I became less -I didn't, I didn't pay so much attention to the body and even more and so the fetish is still there. But it changed a little bit. *Okay. Very good. Thank you.* And when I met Klaus

15:22

M6: I became aware that my body type is in -its fetishized in some way and I was not aware of that. Absolutely not. And it was a totally new experience for me to recognize that they are -that there are chaser's who chase chubby people or older people. And I was very very not shocked a little bit. Oh, we I was in a way shocked surprised. Yeah. And I can't I'm still in the situation to get used to it.

16:00

J6: *It's actually very comforting and wholesome to know, I was in -and still kind of am in the same situation. I had no idea that the bear community existed. My partner's also kind of very much into -a chaser so*

16:12

M6: So for me, it's very interesting because my, my fetish was bodybuilding. And I recognize more at the moment that that my body is okay. And I don't and I don't have to fit with my older fetishes. And it's very strange, but I still have some features for kinky stuff like rubber or leather, which is a kind of result of the superhero costumes. And yeah

16:57

J6: Thank you. Fetishization in general do you find it a positive thing and negative thing? Neutral? *What do you mean?* Is it -is fetishization? Is it good? Is it bad? Is it -is it okay?

17:13

M6: I think-I think every fetish is okay when there is an agreement between the persons and everything is done on a Zustimmung when when you *when you're in agreement*.

17:40

J6: Very good, the next couple questions are more so geared toward the apps but asking about discrimination, I guess, throwing away the apps or ignoring the apps, are there any discriminations that you've experienced as a gay person or in general or

17:56

M6: Well let's say I didn't feel discrimination but there are some parts which well as a - as a chubby person, I felt a lot of discrimination and people are very übergriffig I don't know how you say that in English *invasive*. And they they feel that they have the right to give me advices and that it's very very annoying sometimes and it's you feel a kind of..

18:59

M6: you feel humiliated and that is not very nice. And when you know, we got off my homosexuality I feel very very ..

19:32

M6: it's um,

19:41

M6: I lost my thought, sorry. Ich hab den Erfahrn verloren

19:49

J6: we're talking about being humiliated

19:51

M6: Yeah. Yeah.

19:57

J6: Du kannst das auch auf Deutsch! If you're if I may ask about your relationship with your body, are you satisfied? Are you not satisfied? Are you happy with your appearance?

20:11

M6: Well, I'm much more happier today than I had been. And I tried to follow my own fetish for some time. And I recognized that I don't want to be like the bodybuilders I fetishize because they are very selfish and very, very, oberflächlich -very superficial. Yeah. And so, I think it's much more important to see the person behind the body or the mind behind *yeah* and that is much more important than anything else.

21:00

J6: Thank you. Have you ever had an experience or a real relationship with somebody you consider not to be your type? In general?

21:14

M6: No, no, well,

21:20

[partner in background] *I mean, for the answers to go coherent, you'd have to say that your dominant fetish is body builders, but you do like bears, more than otters. You don't like twink*.

21:33

M6: No, yeah, okay. Yeah, I don't like twink. Twinks. And I don't like I don't like people-um it sounds a little bit racist but I don't like Southern Eastern Asians

21:56

M6: It's it's for me too too childish to -yeah But it's, you can't change it, it's just a thing.

22:14

J6: So you've mostly just been with bearish or bodybuilders it sounds like?

22:18

M6: Yeah, yeah.

22:22

J6: Very good. Very good. And it's safe to say you consider yourself a bear, correct?

22:26

M6: Yeah, I do.

22:28

J6: You roughly remember maybe when you first started identifying as such or maybe the first time you heard about the community or the term?

22:40

M6: Well, I remember, there's a bear there's about an event in Hamburg which is quite popular and it's more like like it's a kind of nice to get together and so- I was very aware of it very early in my in my gay open mind coming out -and I attended it but that was more that yeah.

[indistinctive German in background]

23:26

J6: What does it mean for you personally to be part of the bear community?

23:32

M6: Well there are so many people in the bear community who are very nice very "nett" and they they focus more on on my focus a lot on the person as a character compared to to

24:07

M6: ..it's I think it's more natural *yeah I can agree with you!*

24:22

J6: Do you find in general the bear community to be exclusionary? Ist es ausschließend?

[more indistinctive German in background]

24:27

M6: So I think that is I think every group in the in the gay community is very exclusive.

24:39

J6: Would you say the whole queer community as well?

24:40

M6: Yeah. Because I think that -I think they are told there are many different kinds of groups in the gay community. And they have they they asked for tolerance, but they are not very tolerant to each other. *Yes I think so too*. When you have -when you have, I call them Gucci gays, who are very -they want to be when they want to be slim and they want to have every new

25:20

M6: thing which is in in the in the in the mode welt if I don't know that in the fashion

25:35

M6: And they can be very, very annoying and I met I recognized that a lot on on for example in Vienna 2015 If they do this in song contests because it was one year later than the victory of Conchita Wurst and they thought they would rule the Eurovision Song Contest and that they have the right to to to to this they thought that they owned the contest and it was very annoying.

26:19

J6: It's an- it's for everybody that's the the point of Eurovision. So definitely understandable that that would be annoying. Do you know of any maybe specific law language or labels that are unique to the bear community Spitznamen, aussprache zum Beispiel? Frasen?

26:46

M6: What is perceive?

26:54

M6: *Annehmen* Ah-well I wasn't aware of chasers before- and for me this face was very unusual

27:14

M6: Like you can compare it with a kind of the word twink but it's more a twink who is chasing Chubbies or much older people who which are stockier here than they are themselves than then themselves. And in a way I feel good about it. To be to be chased on one hand, but it can be annoying also it's very.. ambivalent.

28:11

J6: Yeah, yeah.

28:19

M6: Ich muss los!

28:29

Interview 7

Tue, Jul 25, 2023 10:20PM • 22:56

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

bear, term, preference, people, apps, queer, community, younger, growler, romeo, world, exist, category, love, medicalized, chat, exclusionary, chaser, sexual, sexually

00:00

J7...hand that to you/ Interview number two with Klaus

00:03

K7: You know my spiel. *Yes. Yes. No need to repeat.*

00:10

J7: So, um. I think you mentioned you've used or sorry, can I you introduce yourself first?

00:14

K7: Yeah. So my name is Klaus. I'm, I'm, how old am I now? 50. I'm about to turn 52. Yeah, I identify as a bear. I've been out for um 30, almost 35 years. Um, Yeah.

00:33

J7: Thank you very much. And I think you've already mentioned pretty sure you use apps for sure.

00:37

K7: I do. I do use apps. I use specifically Growlr and Romeo. And I love them, because I love to chat, and I love to meet new people. And I, I'm in no way averse to making sexual connections as well. But primarily, I'm just, I just enjoyed talking to people. And, you know, it's, it is also how I met most of my close friends, because I'm essentially, I characterize analytically myself as a demisexual, who, you know, likes to have friends with benefits, and but really, they need to be friends. To have anonymous hookups- are not interesting. So in that, in that sense, the apps are I don't use the apps as hookup apps, I use the apps as Making Friends with Benefits apps. And it's, and it's also, you know, since I have a partner, it's never by myself that not because I couldn't do it, or because we don't have an agreement, but it's just not interesting to me. So the apps are to me, just an incredible digital convenience of, of, you know, having at the ready, the people that I find myself attracted to, which is exclusively bears bigger guys. And, and the apps, you know, Growlr obviously does that to begin with, I have Gay, I have Romeo set to, you know, two parameters. So I only see that, I mean, you know, anyone can chat with him, I'm happy to chat with anyone. But in terms of what I see, it's the people that, you know, are in my, you know, broad sense of, of what I what I like, and to me, you know, I mean, I very much identify with the bear community. I mean, it's just to me, it's a kind of question of, of both that sort of feeling of belonging, but it's also just, I mean, the world is huge, and it's just the the sub-population that I'm most drawn to socially as well as sexually. And so it just -it just, you know, because I'm old enough to have known the world before. And it just like, you know, if you are someone who, who has that preference, and is a member themselves, before digital, it was just extremely

difficult to make contact. And this has just become so easy, which is just wonderful. I will also say that I'm also old enough that the term bear existed when I came out, I think, but the much more dominant term at that point in broadly speaking in this world was Girth and Mirth, and chubby and chaser, and bear sort of had its ascendance a little later. So I came out in 1990. And I became aware of Girth and Mirth, you know, within a couple of years. I mean, that was really also only getting started. But it was really not until the mid to late 90s, that bear culture really caught on in a massive way. I'm perfectly happy about frankly, I like the bear community as a term better, it's more endearing to me. I also like the fact that bear is, is actually quite diverse and open in terms of types, whereas chubby chaser is actually quite defined and has this kind of weird dyadic relationship that implies a target and someone who aims for that target, which is obviously an issue for anyone, you know, who's mindful of these kinds of power differentials.

03:57

J7: Roughly, when did you first start using Growlr and it was Romeo you said?

04:00

K7: So it's, it's a good question. I'm not I'm not a super digital person. So I suppose it's basically when I got my iPhone, I'm not even sure when they started, I guess I guess, before these apps, like I was using, like chat rooms and stuff like that. So so yeah. So this is, I mean, even though it's my own history, I'm not very good with technology. So I can't even tell you when I started to do what. I mean, I remember when I got an email for the first time. So basically, so basically, I'm I'm generally a late adopter, because I'm just not a very techie person, but then I'm happy to adopt anything that, you know, is exciting *fair enough*. And I remember that was like, very early on an email that was like a bear list on the listserv that I was subscribed to. So going back to, at least to the 90s.

04:51

J7: Very good. Do you notice any major differences between Romeo and Growlr for example?

04:57

K7: Well obviously Growlr is a targeted app for for the bear community, which I love. Romeo is also cool because it's just many more people and because it allows you to set parameters. I, I, you know, it works great for me. I'm not on Grindr precisely because Grindr is really more of a hookup app, which is, I mean, A-okay. I mean, *it's not very bear-friendly either*, you know, frankly, I don't care because I couldn't care if someone is not into me. that's totally fine. And if I'm not into them, that's totally fine. I'm extremely laid back about all those things. And I just, it's really an issue of, of what makes sense. And since I'm truly not interested in in a hookup, and as in nothing else, since Grindr is primarily that which, again, beautiful, wonderful, all for that. But um, you know, so that's why that's why I'm not on that. I have to say that I love. I love that. I mean, I love social media. I mean, I'm on Facebook and on Instagram, and I and they are too. I mean, most of my contacts are bears. So I mean, I basically chat across. So in other words, what I'm

trying to say is that, from my experience, there's a total continuum between Facebook, Instagram, Growler, and Romeo because it's basically they're, they're vehicles to connect with people. And because my sole social sexual world is a bear community, there's just total overlaps.

J7: Very good. Roughly how often you use the app?

K7: Multiple times a day in the sense that you know, whenever like, I'm in the subway and I'm like, bored, I check. I mean, I just check who's on and but again, this is it's continuous. I always check Facebook; I always go on Instagram. It's I'm, I'm a junkie in the in that sense. I mean, that just like it's just part of my every day.

06:41

J7: Thank you very much. I think you already listed to your intentions. Friends with benefits. For the most part. Friends, social...

06:50

K7: Friends with the potential of benefits. Let's put it that's how I would characterize it very specifically.

07:00

J7: If I could ask you maybe *Sure* If you can think of your interactions in general, positive, negative.

07:04

K7: Yeah, sure! I love it! Oh, my God! I mean, obviously, you're talking to someone who thinks who A.) thinks they're great. And who understands having the historical perspective that it was like, I would have been so thrilled to have this at 20. I mean, the idea that I can -that I'm carrying a device in my hand that shows me, every bear who is potentially interested, it's just like, I mean, it the degree to which that would have been fabulous, yet completely unfathomable. I can, I can hardly describe that.

07:35

J7: Have you ever had a negative experience on the apps

07:39

K7: Ehhhh- negative, no, in a sense, because my expectations are not that I mean, you know, I know that they're flakes on the apps some people who, who get off on just chatting and teasing. And I mean, I'm such a realist that I mean, in order for it to be negative, I would have had to have expectations that to me, are the wrong expectations to have of these kinds of devices. *Good perspective to have!*

08:00

J7: The next section's kind of body politics- I labeled. May I ask how you perceive different bodies.

08:09

K7: Eh, well look, I have, I definitely I very much identify as a bear as a stocky bear as a chubby bear. I also have always been attracted to stocky, chubby, hairy. Age is actually very open. So yeah, this is this is I mean, you know, I'm a guy who likes to look at beautiful men and to me beautiful men are are big, big men. So that's obviously something that I'm, I mean, it's, I mean, it's so intrinsic to me and the way I look at the world.

08:45

J7: Do you feel that your body is fetishized? If so, how does that make you feel.

08:49

K7: Look- I mean, the I didn't answer it -mean, fetishization is a very difficult concept, obviously. And so my, my so I mean, there are there are different theories on fetishization. I mean, I would, I would take it, I would go a half step back. And I would say that for many, many people, not all, but for many, many people. There are factors that contribute to attraction. I mean, there are those people who I think, you know, are truly either completely broad, maybe in on an asexual spectrum, or who knows, most people that I'm aware of have certain kinds of preferences, sexually, things that arouse them, get them off, make them feel good, etc. I would not call that a fetish. I would call that a basic preference. it's to me it's comparable to people who like asparagus versus people who like Brussel sprouts. It's not. I mean, to me that that kind of attraction is at that level of everyday experience -to me fetishization is, is when the whole thing becomes incredibly closed off. And And possibly, you know, you know, causing difficulties in everyday interactions and then just like a complete, like obsession, and, and I've had periods in my life when I was like, you know, when I was younger and I was so horny all the time and I was like, there was a kind of sexual obsession with it. And so maybe there was a little bit more fetishization. The older I get, I just accept it as a preference. And, and, and it it? No, I mean, to me, it's a preference that circumscribes the group of people that I can see myself or that I wish potentially to be in closer communion with, socially sexual. To me, that is different from fetishization. This is how I tried to approach other people. This is how I perceive when other people approach me and I have I have, so I'm so unbothered by all this. If someone were actually to fetishize me, I would not bother me, except if they're like a crazy stalker who have literally a fetish that is somehow unhealthy. Sure, but if someone has a preference for stocky daddy bears, and I'm like, Great, fantastic. That's totally okay. Very good. So that the term fetishize is where I, and again, it's difficult to describe, it can have that negative. I mean, if it's understood positively, everyone has their preferences here, but it's again, I guess, reflecting in the interview, I really don't use the term, I really use the term preference. And to me the analogy with sex is always with food, and you know, we all have certain things that we enjoy more. Sure. And we have certain things that we can't eat at all, for some reason. You know, some people just cannot eat tomatoes. Right. I mean, this is, you know, and they they just love I don't know, you know, chocolate, I mean, you know,

J7: So thank you very much. I think you got to the next couple questions already.

K7: My relationship with my body. Well, that's an interesting question, I think because, I mean, as I got older, I got chubbier. I was always stocky. But when I was younger, I in the in the categories that sort of exist in the in the bear chubby chaser world, I was kind of in the chaser category I was also I was very young looking, I was always looking younger than my age, I'm much, much more comfortable being a bear in a way that is easily perceived. And.

12:36

K7: And that has something to do with the, with a slight dis-ease with the various categories that exist in the bear world, and chasers are more than okay, but it's like, it is a slightly tricky, let's put it this way, I feel more comfortable in, in, in a category that is not in the hunter picture, I feel much more comfortable. I experienced myself as being a very mainstream Bear. And I like it. And it makes me very comfortable.

13:11

J7: Have you ever had a relationship work experience with someone that you would consider to be not your type?

13:18

K7: Definitely not. I mean, I again, as I'm older, I feel myself being much more open. As I was, when I was younger, the circumscription in terms of type in preference were much stricter. Now, as I'm older, I'm much more relaxed about all of those things. And I mean, I wouldn't have I mean, it would never occur to me to have sex with like a thin young person never, but if the situation is right, and there's like a group situation, and it's everyone's enjoying having fun, like at home very much as demisexual thing, then that's totally okay. But that's, that has more to do with how I've developed in general.

13:59

J7: Sure, sure. Very good. The next section will focus more specifically on the bear contribute. So it's safe to say that you're a bear,

14:05

K7: I very much consider myself as that

14:09

J7: Do you remember or recall when your maybe first started using that label for yourself?

14:13

K7: Well, I mean, I certainly, like I said there was in the 90s when I went in, when it wouldn't have fit me. I mean, I was not a bear. I was like, in my 20s ,you know. No beard because hardly any beard growth, very young looking. You know what I mean? The term cub was only coming in that would have made sense. But I mean, I would have said I'm a chaser. Maybe a stocky chaser. But yeah, I mean, the stronger the beer community got the more sort of real-life aspects it had, the more I consider myself a

bear *sure*. I mean, as we all know, these kinds of descriptions have something to do with with a social field that actually makes them available *absolutely*. And as I said before, when I came out, and I came out in '89. I mean, I don't think that term Certainly in the German-speaking world, it did not exist yet. It came I think it was my senses it was first introduced in the mid 90s.

15:09

J7: Very good generally speaking thoughts feelings, what does it mean to be part of the bear community?

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K7: I love it! I love it! I love it that there is a named community that that fits my social sexual preferences and world!

15:27

J7: Excellent! Do you find the bear community ever to be exclusionary?

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K7: Sure any community is obviously, I mean, this is this is any any? I mean, it's obviously infuriating. When When, when, when, when a community that is that is the target of so many exclusions and antipathies and hatred is its -is itself exclusionary, but it's also totally par for the course.

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J7: Would you say that applies to the entire LGBTQ plus,

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K7: Of course! it applies to so I mean, it's human nature, I mean, human nature, and this is also a big theory in anthropology, it's like, you know, in group versus out group, I mean, the basic definition, or the basic explanation tends to be something like in order to define yourself as something you have to define yourself at something against and that is the kind of the basics can become the basis for some sort of hierarchies. And you know, it's it's, you know, difference can often become hierarchical, hierarchical, that's a problem. Universalism isn't ideal, but no, no person sees every other human being as completely equal to them that the, you know, the fissures and the differences are just too vast.

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J7: Excellent. We kind of already mentioned the terms cubs, chubs.

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K7: Yeah, yeah, no, I know that I know them all.

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J7: Yeah, was there anything specific

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K7: I love the term-I love the term bear. I love the term chub. And I love- I use them for myself. I, I mean, let me ask here more analytically, insofar as these terms have had a tremendously empowering potential. They're not just potential reality to a lot of people. They're amazing. I mean, the fact that I mean, I'm not even talking about fat as a reappropriated term, which is also amazing, but a term like chub is, is, you know, when it first came into currency in the '80s, to basically re not just reappropriate. But re-imagine what is normal normatively speaking, a flaw i.e. fatness, and come up with a term that is intrinsically endearing and meant as, as something that is not just endearing, but sexually desirable, is an incredible act of communal empowerment. So I'm like, all for all of these terms.

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J7: Very good. Are there any maybe unique or newer ways or terms that you need?

17:45

K7: There are constantly new phrases, and it's hard to keep up! I mean, I remember when otter came about, and it took me a while to understand now I understand that. I mean, I am I'm all for that kind of social cultural creativity *excellent*. Obviously, the one that I think it's amazing, certainly didn't exist, in my experience at all in the nine years is something like trans-bear. I mean, this is obviously something that is become much more visible, for sure. It's fabulous.

18:18

J7: The last section *yeah*, we're getting to the homestretch. *Sure*. So if you didn't use apps when you first came out [laughs], did you meet or find community? Yeah.

18:28

K7: [laughs] It was fucking hard! I mean, *much more so than today!* the first people I met were through ads placed in, in like, in like, you know, what is what is, you know, did the doesn't even exist anymore, but like the analog version of Craigslist, yeah. And obviously going to bars, but the problem was that, you know, bars didn't cater to that kind of people I was into or that I was myself. So then I remember early on and you know, seeing bars that came became kind of identified for the bear community or what we now call the bear community/ Girth and Mirth, the bars that are more like they were more like the working class bars those were slightly more open or the leather scene that developed in the 70s already what's more open to bigger pipes Yeah, but I mean, it was it was just annoying as hell, this is why I'm so pro- apps!

19:24

For sure. Just to kind of reformulate one of the questions *sure* when you did start using

19:28

Apps. *Growlr for example, or even before then* Yeah.

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Do you think they helped you re-mold or continue to mold your bear identity? Or..

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K7: It certainly reinforced it but I think the much more interesting issue is that is something that is clearly historical development which is which is of, an extraordinarily to me valuable, which is growing up gay, queer, etc. is already difficult and it has -the digital world. It -not to say that it's all good. Now, it's not all good now, but the digital world has, has had the has, has brought with it, at least in the developed Western world, whatever you want to call it, a situation in which the dominant feeling of coming into your own as a gay person, I'm the only one in the world and I'm deeply flawed that construction is, is a beating quickly. Because as you're, as you're discovering your sexual feelings in the broadest sense, the fact that there is there are so many resources out there, even if you live in a small village somewhere or it's like the fact that you're that it's really not that hard to realize that you're not the only one. Okay, that having said that, which is something that holds true of gay culture in general, I'd say queer culture is even more important for the people who end up being part of the bear community, especially on the massive discrimination on weight because if you also grew up as a fat kid, and a queer kid, that's a double marginalization that in all, in many circumstances is just horrid. And the fact that you can discover a world in which that is you use the term fetishized, or at least that there are lots of people who adore this and have preferences for this, let alone people who are themselves this and happy with it and proud of it makes indescribable difference. Absolutely. So that's my answer.

21:30

J7: Thank you, very kindly, and very last question. Generally speaking, is there anything throughout your life that you would say impact or mold/shape your identity as a gay man as a bear?

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K7: Well, again, it's I mean, the interesting thing because, because having come up as I will say something, again, something analytical and historical. When I came out, when I came out, the words and categories that I had available, were very traditional, I came out as homosexual, I used that term to my family. I didn't think it was a horrible thing at all. I like I for whatever reason, I knew enough to think well, it's a it's a perfectly valid human variable, but it is a concept that is highly medicalized and has a trip tricky history. A couple years later, other terms became available and had I had I come out I'd have been younger and come out to the 00's or 10s, I probably would have come out as a bear, queer, etc. And that is clearly progress. Because coming out into a medicalized category, even if you think that it's not like a big medical problem or whatever, it's, it's obviously that's -that's progress. *Very good*

22:47

J7: Before we conclude, *okay*, is there is there anything you'd like to add or *no, this is excellent. It's longer than that*. Thank you very much for your time. *Thank you*.

