

Grindr profile pics are all about the hookup

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Credit: cottonbro studio from Pexels

How do we present ourselves on our dating profiles? When we select our photos, what do our selections say about us? What do they say about the app or service we are using?

Are there differences in the way people present themselves? And if so,

what are some of the driving forces behind the way people present themselves?

I am a Ph.D. candidate in marketing at Concordia University and I use psychology and marketing theories to help me to try and understand how we choose to present ourselves —or self-market —on dating apps.

The way we do this says a lot about us.

Based on my initial findings, both straight and queer men use "costly signals" to attract a mate. However, the form of their signal differs.

Dating apps—a brief history

Tinder is known as having changed the way people date. But Grindr is actually the first geosocial dating app to [hit the market in 2009](#).

Like Tinder, Grindr is a smart phone app which uses your location to generate potential matches nearby. While Tinder requires two potential matches to "like" each other simultaneously ("swipe right") to start a conversation, Grindr gives access to any member to start a conversation with another member nearby. Profile pictures of people around you show up on the screen.

Grindr is the largest "networking app for gay, bi, trans and queer people" with [2.4 million worldwide active users](#). Grindr is most [often referred to as a hookup app](#) because men can meet other men for [hookups](#), seemingly meaningless and often anonymous sex, and move on.

It has been suggested the app has helped queer men who want to [stay in the closet](#) or those who are too young to go out to gay adult venues.

The peacock's tail on Grindr is physical fitness

The [costly signaling theory](#) suggests that people engage in behaviours that appear to be costly because they want to give an honest signal to a potential mate. This signal is something that can not be copied. You cannot "cheat" to display this signal.

The classic example used to describe this phenomenon is the peacock's tail. The quality of the peacock's tail is an honest signal of the quality of its genetic makeup and [fitness](#). A higher-quality tail is costly because it requires energy and resources to grow and maintain.

A costly signal is needed to demonstrate that you are the best match. It is how we know the signal is honest and is not cheating.

For some of us, we may consider an expensive sports car like the Ferrari to be the "peacock's tail." If someone wanted to signal access to resources, a Ferrari could be one such signal as resources are needed to obtain a Ferrari.

In the same way, good physique and physical fitness cannot be cheated. So displaying physical fitness is an honest signal to a healthy lifestyle and good genes.

In my research I found that straight guys on Tinder are more likely to use conspicuous consumption to attract women. Many Tinder men portray themselves with an expensive car for example. Tinder males are likely to signal specific resources or potential for acquiring resources, while women are more likely to signal pro-social behaviours such as benevolence, charitable work or virtue.

But from my observations, the queer men on Grindr use different "costly signals." Their signals are more likely to be about their physical fitness.

They tend to show shirtless pictures with abs, large biceps or pictures taken mid workout. Or they briefly mention how important the gym is to them. This is done to signal positive information about themselves and their genetic fitness to others.

Grindr guys display their [physical fitness](#) and use their good looks. They demonstrate that they spend time in the gym and that they take good care of their body.

Anonymous and fast —not for long term mating

Compared to straight men, they are more likely to explicitly state that they are "DTF," that is, looking for sex or a hookup. Grindr males are more likely to stay anonymous on their profiles than their Tinder counterparts. They want to efficiently show that they can immediately have uncommitted sex with a stranger. This is also done by showing body pictures with their abs on display.

With my preliminary analysis, I find that Grindr men use costly [signaling](#) to demonstrate their genetic fitness to potential mates. This is different from the Tinder guys who use more [conspicuous consumption](#) in their profiles to indicate resources and ability to take care of family.

The signals we use in our profiles, are a function of who we are and what we want from a mate.

The Grindr context is one where long term procreation is rarely the main purpose. The primary concern is to show that they will be a fun hookup, or attractive to be around.

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