



## The Enemy Within

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For people who experience so much discrimination, it shocks me how easily we can go from victim to perpetrator of discrimination. A quick glance at gay men's hook-up site Grindr provides a perfect example. On Grindr, user profiles are peppered with discriminatory language and threats to "block" other guys who don't meet strict physical criteria, which seem to be variations on a "No Fats, No Femmes, No Asians" theme. It's the new "No Dogs, No Blacks, no Irish" and I'd like to think we are better than that.

Lately, the website Douchebags of Grindr ([douchebagsofgrindr.com](http://douchebagsofgrindr.com)) has received attention for calling out ignorant gays for their actions. On this site, guys with hurtful or hateful statements on their Grindr profiles are named and shamed. While I don't necessarily agree with the tactic of humiliation, I do agree with drawing attention to the language that is being used.

I think there is something insidious, if not hypocritical, about using this kind of language (which has so hurt us in the past) to discriminate against minorities *within our minority*. These 'double minorities', for lack of a better way of putting it, seem to be getting it in both ends.

Should we (as LGBT-identified individuals), people belonging to a community that is subjected to discrimination and oppression, force more oppression on certain sub-

communities in our community? And if we do, how can we then expect similar discrimination against us to stop?

You might say that Grindr is a hook-up site and people are just being honest about their sexual preferences. We have the right, of course, to be honest about our preferences. People who prefer male partners *should* be allowed to distinctly choose male partners and likewise for others with other preferences. I don't care if your type is a nappy-wearing middle-aged man. Knock yourself out (in a dungeon covered in baby oil with a plum in your mouth)! As long as it's consensual, I honestly don't care. But what I do *wonder* about is the origins of your preferences.

Most of us have thought about the possible reasons *why* we are gay. Because we are 'different', we have had to think about our sexuality – probably a lot more than our heterosexual brothers and sisters – and because we often face discrimination, we've had to learn to defend ourselves. We know we didn't have a whole lot of choice in the matter.

Yet we rarely give the same kind of scrutiny to what we find attractive in a partner. We *know* what we find attractive but have we thought about *why* they tend to be tall, redhead and Japanese?

Is this a choice or is it something we have no control over? And if we have limited understanding about why we fancy the things we do, does this absolve us from any social responsibility?

For example, is it racist to say you do or don't find Asians attractive? If no, why not? Is it racist to say you *only* fancy black men? If no, why not? It seems to me that in both cases the central focus is the person's *race* and that is the very definition of racism. It also seems a bit short-sighted, if not stupid, to exclude entire nations (probably based on a perception of the size of their penis). It is certainly ignorant to make generalisations for an entire race.

The 'fat' issue is more complicated. It's just another physical characteristic, like someone's eye colour or height. I'll accept that there are considerations of implied health and well-being, but I'll point out that our ideas of what is a healthy body have changed much over the centuries. One era's Chubby is another era's Twiggy.

And so on to the *femme gays*. What is it about feminine gays that provoke such a negative reaction from other gay men? I have my theories (and that's all they are). I'd be interested to hear what you think.

My first thought is that people often react badly to traits in others that we dislike in ourselves. We've all heard stories of the homophobic bullies who turn out to be gay themselves. The most outspoken critics of homosexuality tend to have a suspiciously large interest in it. I remember having an allergic reaction to the only other gay boy in my class at school. His 'gayness' jarred with me because it reflected a part of me that I was, then, trying to suppress. As a result, my initial instinct was to avoid him. Thankfully, we became good friends but it taught me a lesson about examining my motivation.

I think that many gay men have issues with their femininity. Femininity is rarely seen as an attractive quality by gay men. The more girly the gay, the less sexually attractive they are made feel. From a young age, we're taught to hide or repress our femininity. We are picked on when we demonstrate any female qualities. We're called "fag", "sissy" or "queer", often before we know what the words mean or even realise we are gay. Instead, we just learn to have a negative idea of womanhood because our society is riddled with misogynist undertones.

It's difficult to separate homophobia from misogyny because both are based on inequality, i.e. the notion that men are superior to women. It is assumed that men and women have different roles and that it "unmans" a man to perform a "female" role, such as it "de-feminises" a woman to perform a "male" role. We're taught gender roles at birth—from the pink or blue clothes, to our first bike or doll, to being enrolled in soccer or ballet – and we spend the rest of our life's desperately trying to perform them or ignore them.

Certainly, there are gay men who can be considered traditionally masculine and traditionally feminine lesbians – but there are just as many who blur the lines and have difficulties in performing traditional gender roles.

In many ways, we should be grateful that they exist. It was these gays, who, failing to "pass" as straight and sick of the persecution they endured as a result, kick-started the modern gay rights movement. There were femme drag queens not 'straight-acting' football players at Stonewall. Yet instead, the widely-held view is that the femme gays (and the butch dykes and the drag queens and the trans- community) are somehow "spoiling it for the others" by being so damned deviant.

It seems to me that gay people are fighting a losing battle in the struggle for equality as long as we fail to resolve this issue. We can never achieve acceptance from others if we can barely even tolerate ourselves. All this unease and anxiety around blurring gender roles harms both men and women. We're all missing out on experiences, too busy being ashamed or self-conscious. Or Douchebags.

Originally published in the GCN [www.gcn.ie](http://www.gcn.ie)