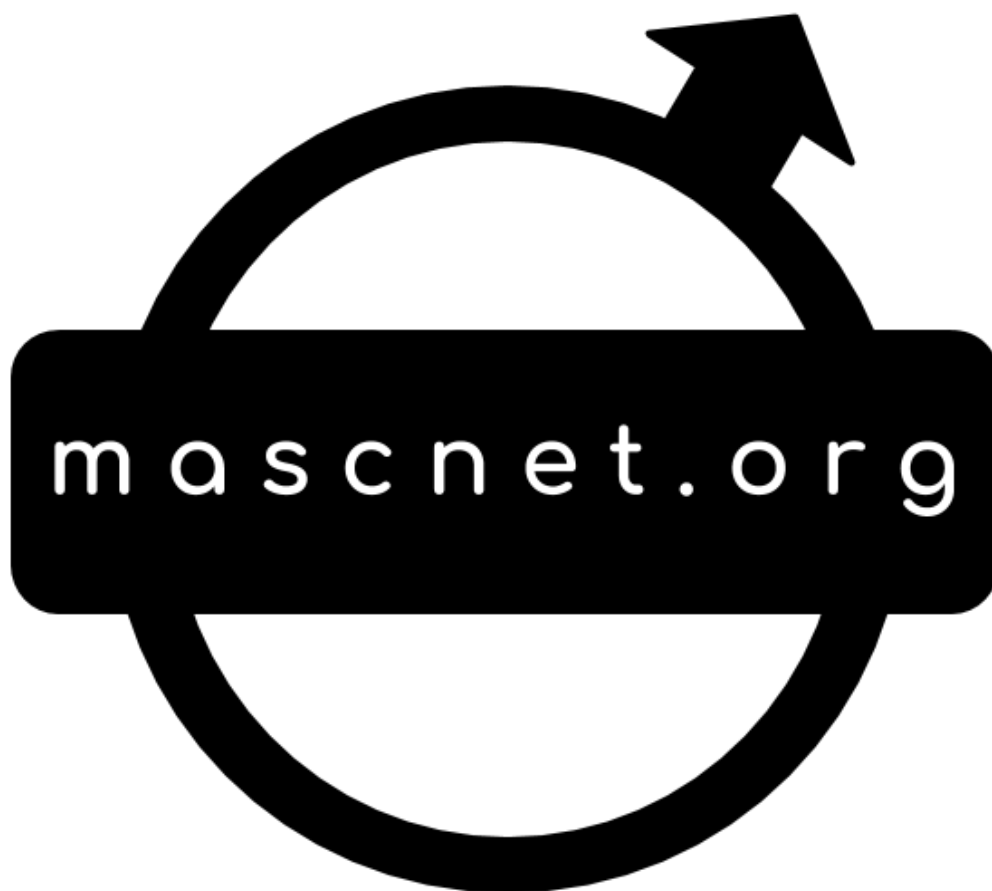


**Masculinity, Sex and Popular Culture
Research Network Launch**



**Masculinity and Body Image in the 21st Century
Friday 3rd May 2019
BCU, Curzon Building Board Room**

Welcome to the launch of the Masculinity, Sex and Popular Culture Research Network, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

This symposium will explore contemporary concerns about men's physical and mental well-being within the context of a sexualised culture and will focus on male body image. Some of the questions that the network plans to address include:

- How is the male body sexualised across a breadth of online and offline media?
- What does sexualised masculinity mean for the social and cultural construction of masculinities?
- What politics underpin sexualised masculinity?
- What is the relationship between debates around health and well-being, and sexualised masculinity?
- How do neoliberalism, precarity, class, race, nation and geographic region impact on manifestations of sexualised masculinity across Europe?

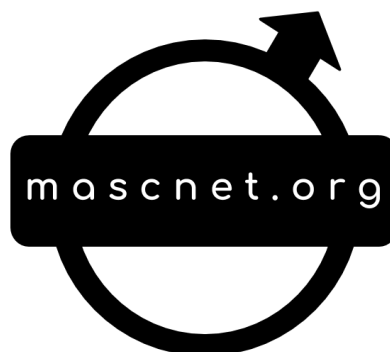
This is the official launch of a series of events that will be taking place during 2019 and 2020 across Europe in Birmingham, Berlin and Barcelona to bring researchers across the arts, humanities and social sciences together to explore approaches and debates around sex, sexuality and contemporary masculinity and to share ideas with the public.

You can find more about our events and join the network at <http://mascnet.org>

John Mercer, Clarissa Smith, Charlie Sarson



Arts & Humanities
Research Council



Masculinity, Sex and Popular Culture AHRC Network Launch

Schedule

9.30 Welcome and Introductions

John Mercer and Clarissa Smith *Masculinity, Sex and Popular Culture*

10.00 – 11.30 **Panel 1: The Field of Masculinities**

Chair: Ben Light (Salford) with Ofer Nur (Tel Aviv)

- Stefan Lawrence (Newman) *White Heterosexual Men, Athletic Bodies, and the Pleasure of Unruly Racialization*
- David Abbott (Bristol) *Young Disabled Men Negotiating Sex and Sexuality in England*
- Michael Toze (Lincoln) *Self-Made Men: Transmasculine Embodiment and Body Image*
- Finn Mackay (UWE) *"It's to do with a look rather than anything else (and the bravery needed to wear it)": Female Masculinity Today*
- Michael Nebeling Petersen (SDU), Camilla Bruun Eriksen (SDU), Signe Rom Rasmussen (SDU), *Medicine Man: Media Assemblages of Medicalized Masculinity*

Coffee Break

11.45 – 13.00 **Panel 2: Masculine Representations**

Chair: Lawrence Napper (Kings College)

- Mark Simpson *Objectify Yourself: Spornosexual Politics*
- Ian Sergeant (BCU) *The Black Body Politic*
- Daniel Martin (Warwick) *"What I'm Out for is a Good Time, All the Rest is Propaganda": Excessive Bodies, Hyper-Masculinity and the Performance of the Northernness on Geordie Shore*
- Ashley Morgan (Cardiff Met) *Who is this 'buff' body for? Hegemonic Masculinity and the Absence of Sex in Silent Witness*

13.00 – 14.00 Networking Lunch

14.00 – 15.00 **Jamie Hakim (UEA) talks to Kane Race (Sydney) about his book *'The Gay Science; Intimate Experiments with the Problem of HIV'* (Routledge, 2018)**

15.00 – 16.30 **Panel 3: Masculinity and Digital Intimacies**
Chair: Jose Arroyo (Warwick)

- Andrea Waling (La Trobe) *Men Sexting and Dick Pics*
- Robert Cserni (Stony Brook) *Dating and Rating on Grindr: Trade and Exchanges in a Virtual Sexual Market*
- Kristian Møller (IT University Copenhagen) *The Emergence and Modulation of Chemsex Imaginaries on Pornhub and a Video Conferencing Service*
- Jasmin Degeling and Sarah Horn (Ruhr University Bochum) *'Mediated Masculinities: Visual Archives, Masculinities and Race in Contemporary Practices of Self-/Documentation*

Coffee Break

16.45 – 18.00 **Panel 4: Performing Masculinity**

Charlie Sarson (BCU) and Linda Stupart (BCU) talk to artists;

- Charlie Cornforth (Plymouth) *'Multiple Conflicts: a Physical Negotiation of Masculine Hegemony, Ego and Power'*
- Francisco González Rosas *'Dating for Export'*
- Sam Cottington *'Do What You Can't'*

18.00 – 18.15 Closing comments

Abstracts

Stefan Lawrence

Newman University, Birmingham, UK

White Heterosexual Men, Athletic Bodies, and the Pleasure of Unruly Racialization

In recent times, the semi-naked male athletic body—an object that thirty years or so ago would have been confined to (what would now be considered) LGBT magazines, and/ or to hypermasculine subcultures, such as bodybuilding—has shifted from the peripheries of popular culture to the very centre of the late modern cultural imagination. In turn, this has invited comment from social scientists of different shades on the changing gazes of heterosexual men. Interestingly, and despite frequently appearing in sport and leisure media, the racialized aspects of this change are yet to be explored fully. This paper, therefore, considers how white heterosexual men (de)construct and (re)attach gendered and sexualized meanings to those male athletic bodies they struggle to define “racially.” Borrowing Gilroy’s use of the term “unruly,” which he employs to capture those moments of multiculturalism that are hard to “home” culturally or geographically, I refer to this struggle as a process of unruly racialization. After analyzing interviews with twenty-two self-identifying white, British, heterosexual men, this paper argues that male bodies racialized as unruly are marked with varying degrees of intrigue, jealousy, admiration, and fear, symptomatic of the late modern societies. I conclude by reflecting on the extent to which this cultural shift can be read as a move toward a future beyond ‘race’.

David Abbott

University of Bristol

Young Disabled Men Negotiating Sex and Sexuality in England

The intersection of Disability, gender, sex and sexuality has often been contested and problematic. Empirical research carried out in 2016-17 in England with Disabled men with muscular dystrophy revealed that significant barriers to being sexual and having sex remain. These included: lack of private space without scrutiny; physical/bodily challenges associated in having sex; lack of accessible spaces to meet people to form sexual relationships; and the sometimes limiting and discriminatory attitudes of people around them. Men in the research were clear and eloquent about the importance of different kinds of sexual relationships to their sense of self and emerging manhood. In times of austerity, access to sexual pleasure can be regarded as a luxury rather than an integral part of how Disabled men (and women) should be supported. For these Disabled men their masculinity and gender was often heavily denied or disputed by others. Living with a muscle wasting condition in times when the social capital of male muscle is dominant creates profound issues of exclusion, self-esteem and identity, which this paper explores.

Michael Toze

University of Lincoln

Self-Made Men: Trans Masculine Embodiment and Body Image

Academic and popular accounts of trans masculinities have historically sought to locate trans men's experiences in reference to those of butch women, as in the 'Butch-FTM border wars' of the 1990s, and Halberstam's (1998) account of female masculinity as 'masculinity without men'. More recently, there has been greater recognition of non-binary identities as fundamentally challenging the binaries of man and woman. Yet for many trans men, transmasculinity is fundamentally focused around a desire for male embodiment, and the realisation of that through practices such as testosterone therapy, physical exercise and gendered self-expression (Prosser, 1998; Davy, 2011; Heinz, 2016).

In society, trans men are increasingly receiving recognition in contexts that have previously been associated with normative understandings of male sexual embodiment. Trans men have been featured as cover models on 'Men's Health' and 'Gay Times'. A UK court case is currently underway to determine whether a man who has given birth can be recognised as his child's father. As yet, however, the implications of trans masculinity for broader social understandings of masculine identity, embodiment and sexuality remain relatively under-explored.

This paper presents contemporary debates and developments in trans masculine culture, and explores the implications for theorising maleness, manhood and masculinity.

Finn Mackay

University of the West of England

"It's to do with a look rather than anything else (and the bravery needed to wear it)": Female Masculinity Today

This paper presentation will draw on empirical data from survey research into lesbian and queer masculinities in the UK, conducted in 2017, which garnered over two hundred responses.

Men who are male bodied are not the only ones affected by increasingly sexualised imagery of men and masculinity in advertising and popular culture. In order to understand the construction of masculinity, perspectives of female-bodied individuals who identify as and/or with masculinities can offer insight. Advertising marketed at men has become more reliant on images of idealised male body types - pectoral muscles, stomach muscles and a muscular physique overall, displayed on a youthful, able-bodied and often White model (Katz, 2003).

This was noted by my respondents, yet those who identified with masculinities expanded their definition of masculinity beyond the body, emphasising attitudes, hobbies, sartorial style, inner essence or energy. However, the body still haunted these intellectual understandings, sometimes leading to feelings

of inadequacy and lack; respondents defined masculinity as: muscular; big bushy beards; appearance of sexual organs; cock identified. Research into female masculinities has been US focussed, mostly from the 1990s (Halberstam, 1998, 1998b; Burana et al, 1994). Scholars such as Crawley (2008) emphasise the interaction between bodily characteristics and outward masculine presentation; psychologists Levitt and Hiestand (2005) have investigated the link between body, sexuality and masculine gender identity. Trans men have added scholarship on embodied realities, masculine and male sex and gender identity (Noble 2007, 2004). My research explores what female masculinity means today, bringing an up to date UK specific focus on definitions of masculinity and how it is expressed on/through the body when the sexed characteristics of that body are not defined as male.

Michael Nebeling Petersen, Camilla Bruun Eriksen, Signe Rom Rasmussen

University of Southern Denmark

Medicine Man: Media Assemblages of Medicalized Masculinity

Medicine Man: Media Assemblages of Medicalized Masculinity explores how everyday cultures and perceptions of middle age men's bodies unfold when masculinity is increasingly both mediatized and medicalized. Today large parts of intimate life, health and social relations have become mediatized: Bodies are monitored using mobile apps, communities are formed on social media, and intimate questions are increasingly the topic of TV-shows and intensified in online campaigns.

We define middle age as the life period between youth and old age (40 to 65 years) and the project embraces both urban and provincial masculinity as well as heterosexual, homosexual and transgendered men. *Medicine Man* is based on a theoretical framework of somatechnics and assemblage theory.

The project considers medicalization as a cultural phenomenon, which emerges inseparably from contemporary media, and thus adds humanistic research to health and social sciences about how mediatized culture shapes the body and its medicalized interventions and how notions of beauty, sexuality and health unfolds.

Mark Simpson

Objectify Yourself: Spornosexual Politics

Male self-sexualisation – or male 'objectification' – once stigmatised as a 'feminine' weakness that was ridiculous, emasculating and – if you did it right – perverted in a man, is now the new normal. Spornosexuality is positively rampant.

Since the 80s and 90s, advertising has of course increasingly sexploited the idealised male body, but today's generation of young men do it themselves,

for shares and likes or OnlyFans subs – as much ‘sluttier’ Nick Kamens, Marky Marks and David Gandys.

Paco Rabanne’s 2017 Pure Xcess aftershave ad appears to play with this development – a young man stripping in his bathroom is observed through peepholes by hyperventilating, clothed, voyeuring young women. Complaints were made to the ASA that the man was objectified. Which apparently is a bad thing.

The ASA rejected the complaints – ruling that he was not objectified. Despite this being the entire point of the ad.

This presentation will analyse the argument presented by the ASA, what it reveals about common sense ideas about ‘objectification’ – and the curious cultural blindness to the male variety.

Ian Sergeant

Birmingham City University

The Black Body Politic

This practice-led research seeks to respond to the symposium’s key questions, through the use of mixed methods to interrogate and challenge prevalent negative and binary socio-cultural constructs of black masculinity. This will be achieved through the performance of an extract from a theatre production, *Revealed*, a play that addresses issues of black masculinity, sexuality, mental health and wellbeing.

By way of introduction at the symposium, detail of methods undertaken to develop the narrative of *Revealed* will be shared. As primary data has been derived from a recently convened focus group discussion with black men aged 21+ who were asked a series of questions in order to determine their thoughts on these themes.

In context of the “collective identity” (Ogbu, 2004) of black people, across intersections of class, faith and popular culture homophobic attitudes are freely expressed. Virile masculine identities are instead reinforced (Ross, 1998,) which is characterised by the hyper-masculine father towards his gay son in *Revealed*. Furthermore, non-displays of (hyper) masculine behaviours are misconstrued as being ‘gay’, ‘lame’ ‘moist’, terms deemed derogatory amongst some young people, as explained during the focus group.

Such attitudes are akin to the perceived stigma attached to homosexuality and those associated with the person, i.e. community, parents and friends (Buttaro, 2012), as black LGBT’s are potentially subjected to two forms of oppression of being black and gay (Robinson, 2009). Yet as attested during focus group discussions and according to (Kite, 1996) such attitudes can be generational or due to level of education.

Through the performance and introduction the aim is to contextualise the practice-led approach of conducting a focus group as method due to (Gomm, 2008) notion of emancipatory and or empowerment research, and the usefulness of focus groups of like-minded people (Kaye Wellings, 2000).

Daniel Martin

University of Warwick

***“What I’m Out for is a Good Time, All the Rest is Propaganda”:
Excessive Bodies, Hyper-Masculinity and the Performance of the
Northernness on Geordie Shore***

This paper proposes the need to consider how ‘Northernness’ intersects with the cultural aesthetics of contemporary working-class masculinity, through a reading of MTV’s *Geordie Shore* (2011-). Since first airing, critics have understood the series’ hyper-sexual aesthetics as imbricated with reality television’s classed and gendered association of images of abject ‘underclass’ bodies with narratives of (non)labour and social exclusion. However, in critical responses, categories of regional identity are often conflated with class in ways that potentially limit our understanding of the ideological complexity of show’s representation. This paper attends to this critical oversight. I argue that one of the ways in which the series and its performers articulate the tensions of contemporary working-class selfhood is through the discursive construction and performance of Northernness as a particularly embodied social identity. I define Northernness as a construct of regional identity that signifies historically embedded discourses related to hyper-masculinity, proletarian action, and the stability of industrial labour. In a neoliberal context, Northernness ambivalently connotes both an idealised image of working-class agency and that image’s growing irrelevance. Moreover, this construct of Northernness is often materialised through a dominant male body-image, that of the virile muscular body. This ‘Northern body’ has been a persistent image in national culture, expressive of the changing ‘structures of feeling’ that circulate around working-class men. *Geordie Shore* offers a particularly contemporary iteration of this embodiment. By examining how the show presents the male body as a hyper-muscular and hyper-sexual object, I wish to treat the Northern body as a construct onto which ideological tensions of post-industrial masculinity are made visible in British culture. An analysis of this body poses the question: is the performance of Northernness used to maintain the historic cultural capital of bodily ‘graft’, or is it used to signify the contemporary irrelevance of this type of man?

Ashley Morgan

Cardiff Metropolitan University

Who is this ‘buff’ body for? Hegemonic masculinity and the absence of sex in Silent Witness.

In the post-millennial landscape of popular television (Polasek, 2012), men engaged in sexual behaviours are highly present. Recent examples include *Game of Thrones* (Nutter, 2011—present), *Versailles* (Langlois, 2015—present), and *Poldark* (Bazalgette, 2015—present). Moreover, sexual behaviour is present rather than traditionally absent, for example, in the rebooted *Dr Who* (2005—present), much reference is made about the Doctor’s sexual conquests and relationships (Morgan, forthcoming). Popular

television series have also allowed for greater examples of more complex, and nuanced forms of male sexual behaviours, over longer story arcs, including a lack of sex, such as in *Sherlock* (McGuigan, 2010—present) while maintaining the tropes of hegemonic masculinity (Morgan, forthcoming). This article examines the representation of the body of the character of Jack Hodges (David Caves) from *Silent Witness* (O'Sullivan, 1996—present), and focuses on the paradox of his body which is highly eroticised through rippling musculature, yet he is rarely if ever, portrayed engaged in the act of sex. In film, male muscular bodies are likely to be 'romantically involved' (Morrison and Halton, 2009) but sexual behaviour is absent in this representation. This begs the question, who is this buff body for? Jack's body is docile in the Foucauldian sense, built up and displayed through cage fighting, which the character uses as a release from the stresses of the job. Therefore, the buff masculine body which has been 'polished up' is presented to audiences. In this context, the buff body moves beyond the docile body, suggesting that the work that has gone into it is a substitute for sexual relations. Jack's job as a forensic scientist already gives him a position of hegemonic masculinity in terms of masculinity performed through expertise (Morgan, 2014), therefore this paper suggests that the buff body is for audience consumption.

Andrea Waling

La Trobe University, Australia

Men, Sexting and Dick Pics

In the last couple of years, the 'Dick Pic' has been featured prominently in media and popular discourses. Made possible by advents in mobile technology, Dick Pics have been characterised as a form of image-based sexual violence used against women, and likening them as yet another extension of heterosexual men's perceived problematic and aggressive 'toxic' masculinity. Recent research on contemporary discourses surrounding the Dick Pic has noted a disgust discourse, whereby the (assumed) heterosexual male penis is seen as grotesque and warrants hiding. Little to no attention has been paid to the erotic potential of the Dick Pic, nor how a queering of the Dick Pic can be possible. Further, men's voices have generally been absent in discussions of sexting, with most research focused on adolescent engagement with the practice. How do men engage in sexting? What meanings do they ascribe to their sending of Dick Pics? How do they feel about the erotic potential of their bodies?

Drawing from an analysis of media articles and blogs discussing the Dick Pic, and qualitative interviews with young, heterosexual Australian men who engage in sexting practices, this paper questions whether it is possible to look beyond the sexual harassment framing, and find alternate meanings to the Dick Pic. This is achieved using a queer theory approach by engaging with Sedgwick's work on reparative readings. It considers the Dick Pic in wake of digitally mediated sexuality, #metoo movement, increased recognition of men's body image anxieties and vulnerabilities, and new ways of understanding men's heterosexuality and intimate relations with women.

Robert T. Cserni
Stony Brook University

Dating and Rating on Grindr: Trade and Exchanges in a Virtual Sexual Market

The general theoretical issue of this paper centres on how technologically-mediated processes of globalization of gay culture influence the (re)constructions of sexualities and sexual identities of men who have sex with men (MSM)/gay men as well as the nature of their interpersonal interactions. More specifically, I argue that location-based mobile dating apps such as Grindr are a sexual market, in which users can be considered self-objectified sexual commodities. Thus, I am interested in exploring the characteristics of actors (users) in this sexual market. In addition, I am interested in examining which characteristics and in what way they are associated with actors' perceived sexual capital. In order to do so, I used data from a sample of Grindr profiles in New York City, London, Vienna, and Tel-Aviv. The data were collected during four time points – weekday afternoons, weekday evenings, weekend afternoons and weekend evenings. All the information users provided in their profiles was coded. Special attention was given to the way the users described themselves and what they were looking for. Furthermore, in order to gain a more holistic understanding of the interactions in this sexual market I also conducted interviews with MSM/gay men in these localities. I believe this study will contribute to and complement existing literature on technology, sexualities, and, in particular, literature on sexual capital.

Kristian Møller
IT University of Copenhagen

The emergence and modulation of chemsex imaginaries on Pornhub and a video conferencing service

This paper approaches the phenomenon of 'chemsex', sexual encounters between gay and bisexual men, in which the recreational drugs GHB/GBL, mephedrone and crystallized methamphetamine (crystal meth) are consumed (Hakim 2018). What is on paper a rather open and loosely defined subject area, the concept has in practice become conflated with "problematic chemsex". The paper counters such strategic backgrounding by paying attention to chemsex as an erotic imaginary available for playful consumption to a wider range of people and publics than suggested by the ongoing medical/media/sexual panic. Chemsex imaginaries are conceived of as "cultural achievements" (Bersani, 1995: 64), in which flows of pleasure, passion, fear and shame circulate, modulate, transform the event itself, emerging in (de)territorializing movements (Delanda 2006).

The paper's methodology is inspired by porn studies' insistence to operate across genre, audience and sex cultural context (Attwood 2002) and more

recently that the platformization of porn requires careful attention to the multiple transformations emerging with these infrastructures (Paasonen (2011). Two major sites of online representation and practice of chemsex are interrogated: the sometimes Do-It-Yourself (DIY) porn platform Pornhub, and a conference call service (service name redacted for ethical concerns) used for socio-sexual use of crystal meth. The analysis draws together different semiotic, material and social elements (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), namely, distribution platform modes of governance, video clip genre variations, the framing work done by titles and playlists, and the social erotic consumption done in the comments sections. From this it asks: What are the aesthetic, temporal and affective differences in chemsex imaginary? What flows does crystal meth enhance or modulate, and conversely, when is it placed out of sight, to what effects?

Jasmin Degeling and Sarah Horn
Ruhr-University, Bochum, Germany

Mediated Masculinities: Visual Archives, Masculinities and Race in Contemporary Practices of Self-/Documentation

"It's really annoying, it's really frustrating that I am being viewed more and more as – I don't know... An oddity? A threat? I don't know."
Trans* video blogs offer an entry point to problematizing the intricacies of sexuality, masculinity, and race: The above statement is articulated by a trans* vlogger whose self-documentation on YouTube reflects his becoming a black male as becoming a threat. In one of his frequent video updates to his online trans* community, the video camera becomes a medium not only of visual assurance of the documented bodily transition since taking testosterone, but of the different perception of racism that comes with passing as male. We argue that this transition is profoundly connected to documentation practices, media effects and technical conditions which trigger racist visual archives and reinforce a trope of the »angry black man«: Certain video images echo specific visibilities of black masculinities such as surveillance and policing footage. Also at the height of the discourses on police violence against black people and the »Black Lives Matter« movement, Parker Bright intervenes in both the construction of racist visual archives and their current remediation: In his 2017 performance in front of Dana Schutz' abstract painting of the Emmett Till photography during Whitney Biennial in NYC, he contests these archives by blocking the view to the iconic image and wearing a T-Shirt stating »Black Death Spectacle«.

Addressing these complex entanglements of visibility, surveillance, and life-threatening precarity, the practice of video-based self-documentation and the public performance become as much a medium of self/identification with specific masculine subjectivations, as of self-care. In our talk we will aim to trace the contemporary material practices of these visual media archives and try to figure out how they perpetuate and transform mediated black masculinities.

Charlie Cornforth
University of Plymouth

Multiple Conflicts - a physical negotiation of masculine hegemony, ego and power [Film screening]

Multiple Conflicts is a short film that explores the relationship between violence and the construction of masculine identity. Multiple Conflicts seeks to expose the mimeses that lies behind hegemonic constructions of masculinity. Hegemonic culture encourages men to seek ideal, toxic or fictional forms of masculinity. And yet, only a small percentage of men are able to replicate these constructions. Leaving a large percentage of men failing to successfully embody a version of hegemonic masculinity. The inability to accurately embody these ideals creates a plethora of subjective issues. Feelings of failure – combined with hegemonic ideologies such as strength, stoicism, and dominance – create a cyclical rotation of objective conflict and subjective turmoil. Whether upset, angry or hurt, hegemonic codifications call for a man to either repress these feelings or negotiate them via physical, violent means. Much of the violent conflict men negotiate can be traced back to subjective issues that occur from seeking and/or failing to perform an ideal version of masculinity. Multiple Conflicts has been created from a combination of practice as research and autoethnographic methodologies. Interrogating how my own masculinity has interfaced with hegemonic ideals and failed to perform them.

Francisco Gonzalez-Rosas
Concordia University

Dating for Export [Film screening]

The cause-effect relationship between queer embodiments and their cultural inscription is manifestly ambiguous: which one produces the other? Following this reflection, I created the video performance “Dating for Export” (2019, Montreal). The piece presents a queer user performing a selfie session in front of an iPhone. The camera frames different body fragments, quoting the standardized gestures with which users showcase themselves in the profiles of dating and hookup apps. Various imagery, from art history to porn and fashion advertising, unfold in the physical performance, exploring the construction of desire and racial fetishization in queer digital embodiment.

Male desire as related to visual stereotypes was initially approached in the work “Gay Semiotics” by American photographer Hal Foster. At the end of the 1970’s, Foster traced an imaginary of gay iconography and the archetypes involved in the male fantasy in queer mainstream media and subculture. Many of these visual codes -sports, army, S&M, leather fetish- are still alive in porn categories as in queer sociality. I am especially interested in their entanglement with contemporary references from selfie culture and celebrity culture. The design of masculine images -therefore of desire- under conditions

of immediacy, hyper connectivity and surfeit of images in mobile networks is rich and complex.

By closely looking at this system of invisible rules played through online behaviour I will introduce a visual archive of contemporary queer embodiment. Along with the presentation of the video, I will further expand its interconnections through a short talk. In this talk, I will point out to the way gender and sexual desire are produced in the context of self-mediation and use of technology. A visuality that conveys the rather peculiar dynamic of designing desire, for both self-expression and consumption.

Sam Cottingham

Goldsmiths, University of London

'Do What you Can't' [Film screening]

My film 'Do What you Can't' loosely takes the form of an essay film: collaging made and found images and texts that stitch together cross-temporal scenes and voices. The conflicted histories of the 'gay clone' and its contextualisation within the urban erotic western city forms the core of the film; while its visuals splinter, stutter and condense; negotiating the queer and neoliberal economies of image formation and circulation that historical queer images are subsumed into. Forgotten histories and contingent understandings of 'cloneism' and its relationship to desire and assimilation are analysed to make present the anxious momentums and political criticisms of gay men's aesthetics and sexualities.

As the film's images move between documentary and *dérive*, a complex archive emerges that is disloyal to epistemological tendencies to sanitise and order feeling, affect, and experience into chrononormative progress trajectories. Using collage film as a means to bend and overlap temporalities, "do what you can't" attempts to perceive the ideologies, emotions, impulses and momentums that simultaneously alienate us from queer pasts and seal off sensory affective presents.

This notion of alienation emerges as a concern in both visual and audio elements of the film. Alienation from a history that could afford rewarding or complex constructions of the self situated within a community, and alienation from the present: an affective byproduct of the compulsory media and image technologies we are embedded in for our work and social lives. The sensory overstimulation on the surface of our lives contrasting with the ache and melancholia felt by the 'lost generation' of young people growing up under austerity, navigating the promise of queer social sexualities after, and amidst the enduring crises of AIDS, gentrification and precarity.