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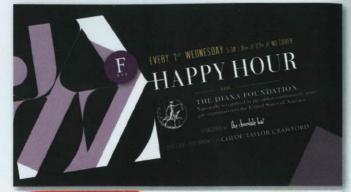
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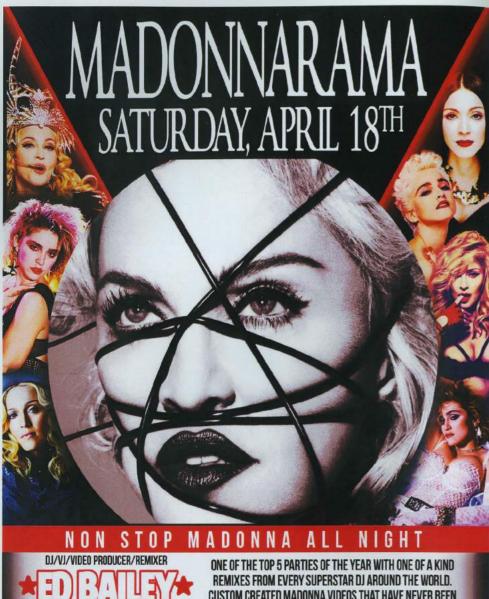














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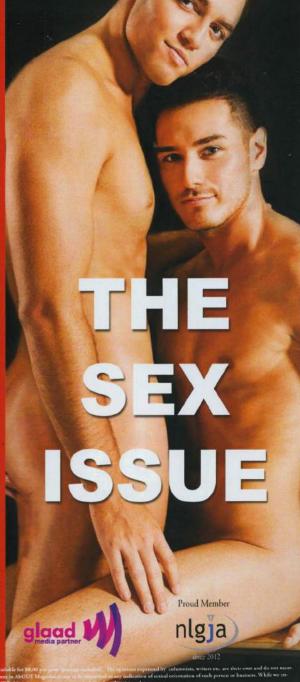
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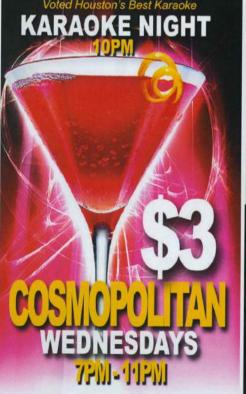


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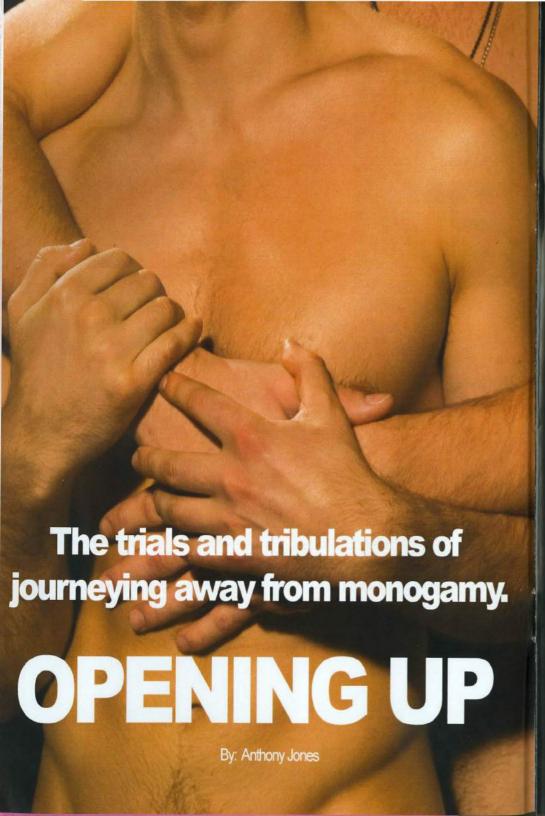




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This fall, I started a job that required me to live part-time, three hours away from Houston. Overnight, my relationship became a long-distance one. My boyfriend and I had already toyed with the idea of opening up our relationship. We were more than comfortable bringing guest stars into our bedroom, but we had yet to allow for rendezvous with others when we were apart. Considering the circle we were in, this was actually a bit unorthodox. One of my friends called me out on it one day. "You two are the most monogamous queer couple I know!" he proclaimed. I felt like a heteronormative prude. With the pending move, I knew it was time for us to challenge ourselves, to take the openness to a new level. But were we ready for it?

I remember when we first made the decision, we both got back on Grindr and changed our status to "Open Relationship." When I'd sign on and see that he was also on, I'd panic. Jealousy would consume me like an unwanted spirit.

The thing I discovered about jealousy is that some people are much more susceptible to it than others. It's like it's part of one's wiring, or a gene someone is born with or without. I have it; he does not. I suppose in the end it's better that both of us don't struggle with this exhausting emotion. It certainly makes for less intense conversations when I tell him about my rendezvous. But sometimes, I'm jealous of his non-jealousness.

I've learned that when these feelings come up for me, the best way to handle them is to simply accept them. I used to try to rationalize the feelings away; then when it was still present, I'd be angry with myself and disappointed in my "weak" character. Now I know that it is what it is. And when I accept the feeling, it seems to pass more easily.

And with time, the jealousy has become less intense. Now, when I see him on Grindr, I might tense up a bit, but I soon relax and casually message him something like, "Any sexy Brklyn boys out tonight?" He'll usually tell me, "No, just old pervs with opening lines like 'wanna suck it?'" Without lying, he tends to downplay his sexual interactions. Or at least that's what I suspect is going on. Maybe he's actually having mediocre to disappointing hookups, but I have a hunch his poor reviews are partly for my benefit. And I have to admit, I appreciate it. When I ask him how a guy was in bed, I'd rather hear him say "meh" than "super hot!" He, on the other hand, seems to get turned on when I report back on my sexy exploits.

Part of having an open relationship meant figuring out what would work for us. What level of honesty and disclosure did we want? What type of rules did we want to commit to? For example, we've agreed that anal sex is reserved just for us. Also, sometimes one partner's rules can be different than the other's. He likes to hear about a hookup as soon as it happens, whereas I ask him to report back in person. It's important to recognize that these rules can always change, and to exercise consistent and thorough communication to recognize what's working and what's not. In this respect, our relationship feels more honest than when we were monogamous. We can safely express our wants, and for the sake of clarity, we have to keep laying our cards out on the table. There is no room for guessing, assuming or hiding things.

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But even with all the communication and the rules, it can still be difficult and full of surprises. In fact, days before I finished this article my boyfriend asked if we could go back to monogamy for a while. Although he was playing by all our rules, and my jealousy issues were lightening up, his last hookup left him feeling guilty.

So the rules might change. We might even go back to the monogamy model permanently someday. Maybe it's easier to live the life of a heteronormative prude. Who knows? What I do know is that we're in love and we get to create whatever relationship we want. And my guess is, there will always be room for guest stars.



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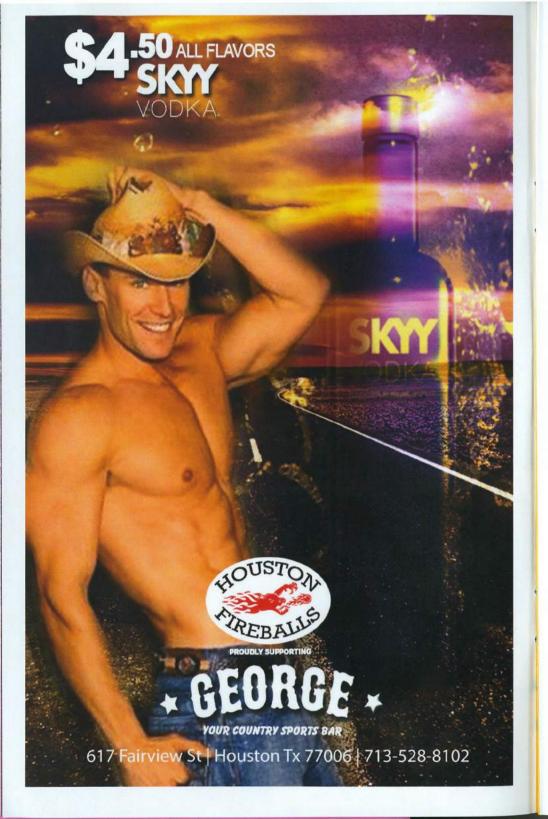




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Exploring the intersection of sex and nightlife culture.

I don't like to make broad, sweeping generalizations, and I especially hate it when people say things like, "There are two kinds of people in this world..." Because, obviously, there aren't two kinds of people in this world. There are lots of kinds of people in this world. But one thing I think I can confidently say after a decade of going out there are two kinds of gay guys in this city: the ones who go out to bars and clubs looking to get laid, and the ones who stay home.

I think most people—most, not all—who go out are looking to get laid. Or at least to meet someone they might be interested in fucking. Sure, there are lots of other reasons to go out: dancing, socializing, getting drunk, doing drugs. Networking, maybe? I'm told lots of people like EDM, but I feel like they probably really just like MDMA. I don't know. But behind all of those other reasons, I believe that when most people go out—and most gay guys in particular—they're at least semiconsciously open to the possibility of having sex. I mean, even most of the couples I know go out looking for guys to take home and fool around with together.

That's just kind of what nightlife is for, right? It's both a release valve and a repository of sexual energy. That's why people throw parties. That's why people get drunk; to loosen up their inhibitions. That's why there are go-go boys dancing mostly naked on the bar; to get you turned on and trick you into thinking you've got a shot with them—and sometimes you do! Nightlife, while it is many things, is fundamentally built around the possibility of getting lucky.

None of which is to say that the only point in going out is to get laid. That's a really important distinction: just because you don't take someone home doesn't mean that the entire night was a waste of time. Maybe you had a blast on the dance floor; maybe you met some fascinating new people. It's all about enjoying the process regardless of the result.

Think about the last time you went to a party. Whether it was at a club or even someone's apartment, I'd be willing to bet that on some level you were hoping to meet someone you could fuck. Or fall in love with—and then fuck. The point is, even when you think you're not looking, you're probably looking.

If, like me, you go out habitually, you've probably noticed a certain shift that takes place around last call. After 2am, people become—how shall I put this? At best, a little less picky. At worst, kinda desperate. Although desperate is such a harsh word. Either way, there's a noticeable shift in the zeal, the tenacity with which we try to get laid.

A co-worker recently pointed out how many times he and other friends have been propositioned at 3am by guys on Grindr whose profiles say things like, "Not interested in casual sex," or "Looking for LTR," or something like that. But once the bars and parties have mostly shut down those LTRs turn into NSAs. Maybe it's just the result of a long night of drinking and indulging in other vices, but for some, what we want—or what we say we want—is different after hours than it is in broad daylight.

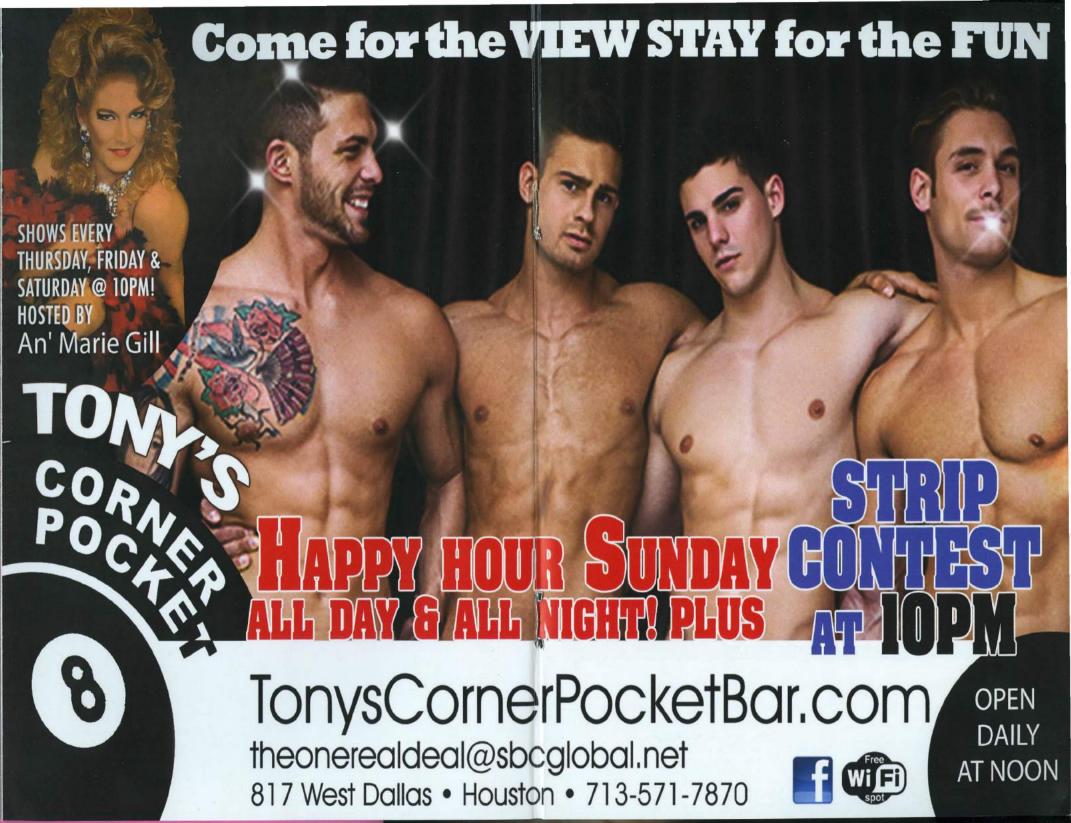
I'm no exception. The only time I ever use Grindr is after 2am, after the bars close, after the party ends and I still haven't quite gotten what I'm after. I simply have no use for it at any other time of day. Think about this: Maybe you made out with a cute guy earlier and he gave you his number, but when you asked if he wanted to come home with you he turned you down. But then you get back to The Woodlands and he texts you several naked selfies and says he'll get a cab and meet you at your place, what's your address? But it's after three and you left him in Montrose. Plus, maybe you want to go to dinner with this guy sometime and see where it goes. So instead of giving him your address, you get on Grindr.

Maybe you made a New Year's resolution to really make an effort to only sleep with people you've gotten to know. But then it's 5am and you know there's a sex party that's still open for another two hours...

"Once the bars shut down, a lot of those LTRs turn into NSAs."

What I find myself wondering is whether what we want after last call is what we want in "real" life. It's like when people get belligerently drunk and decide to drop a whole bunch of "truth bombs." Is that what they really think, or just the booze talking? It's probably a little bit of both, the way nightlife is a little bit of both. Clubland is fantasy land, after all: a hedonistic playground that exists only in the dark of night. But it's really there, and the things we do, the choices we make do have consequences.

I think what we really want lies somewhere between the things we tell ourselves and others in the light of day and the extreme desires we indulge in after 4am. Figuring out where that midpoint is, well, that's the tricky part.



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Grindr: Why It's Ruining My Chances of Finding Substantiality

The other day a girlfriend started telling me about this guy she wants me to meet. The guy she told me about seemed lovely -- smart, fit, dedicated to his friends and family -- until the very last sentence that rolled off her tongue almost effortlessly: "Oh, yeah, and he's on this app called Grindr, like, all the time."

Don't get me wrong: I'm on Grindr, and I use it almost as much as I do Facebook or Twitter, but that's why it repels me to hear that this seemingly perfect gentleman is there too. I absolutely hate about 90 percent of the men I encounter on Grindr. Why? Most, if not all, of them are using the app first for sex and second for a relationship — you know, if it gets to that point. Guess what, though: I'm guilty of using the app for sex too. I'm only human.

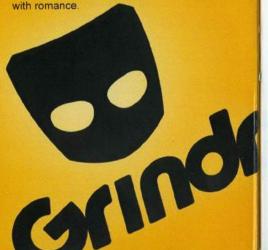
So why can't I take the situation with a grain of salt and trust a guy until he gives me a reason not to? Because I know that Grindr is ruining our chances of finding substantiality. It's making us pickier than ever when it comes to romance. If you're on Grindr, think about your routine. You start talking to a really cute guy — for sex or otherwise — based solely on his looks. Then another cute guy messages you, or you find another one to message. It's suddenly as if the first guy didn't even exist. It's a midlife crisis executed in the span of five minutes: Something shinier and better has already come along, and you didn't even have to buy a BMW. Good for you.

But let's take a look at what happens when you actually start meeting these men in person. Let's say you're on the app for a LTR (long-term relationship). The aforementioned first guy takes you out to dinner (or vice versa); you're having excellent conversation and really hitting it off. He proposes to see you again, and you're totally into it. Don't you dare deny, though, that you're thinking about that second, third, maybe even fourth guy who messaged you the same day. These guys are now asking you to go out, and you've already set dates with them too. Now, because you're conditioned to want the next best thing, you're suddenly creating a Google calendar just for your Grindr dates. Pathetic? I'll let you be the judge. Here's the kicker: These guys you're going out with are most likely doing the same damn thing.

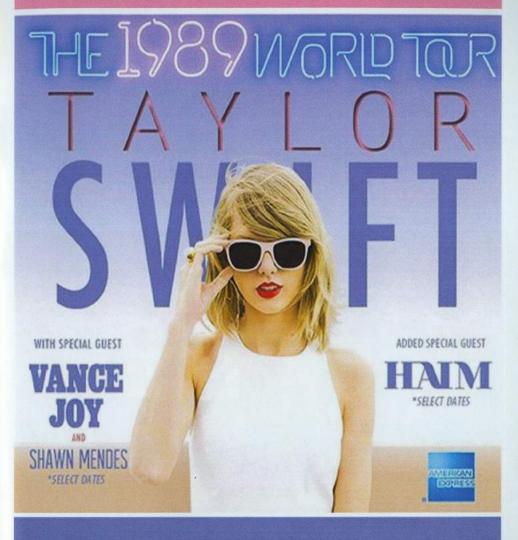
Nonetheless, if you're like most of the Grindr gays, as I like to call them, you're probably just looking for a casual play date, someone to let off some steam with, right? I don't know about you, but I've found that the more men I casually play with, the harder it is for me to want, or even find, true romance. Why would I want romance when I'm perfectly independent and can have sex whenever I want it, from whomever I please? Call me a prematurely bitter old queen, but I think Grindr is bound to create cheating down the road, because it's conditioning us to want something new all the time — not that we don't already want something new all the time; just ask anyone working customer service in electronics.

This brings me to my next thought: monogamy. Oh, monogamy, you silly little social construct. A good portion of gay men, maybe those not so acclimated to the PC vernacular, say that monogamy is killing today's gay (and straight) couples, so nonmonogamy must be the way to go. But I have to first think about what's causing monogamy's death. I'd like to think, as I'm messaging a Grindr gay right now, that this small yet powerful app has a lot to do with it. However, I'm not sure I agree. Monogamy is the healthiest option for gay men. More on that later, folks.

If this guy my friend wants so badly to set me up with is like me and takes to the daily grind for his own advantage, why, then, is it so difficult for me to accept him as he is? I think it's my own guilty conscience, knowing full well that Grindr is terrible for me, so, in turn, it's making everyone terrible who uses it. Was that too over-the-top? Probably. Call me the gay Carrie Bradshaw, but I leave you with this: Is Grindr becoming our millennial cocaine? There's nothing like a good "sup" to get you high with romance.



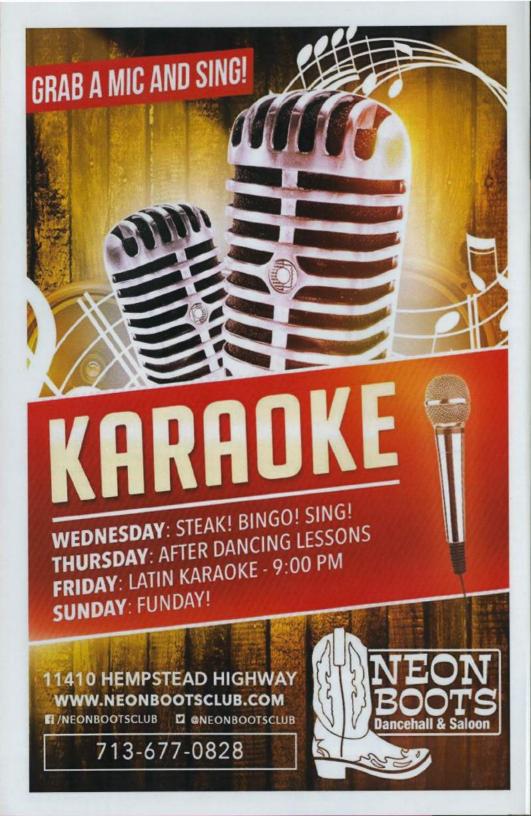
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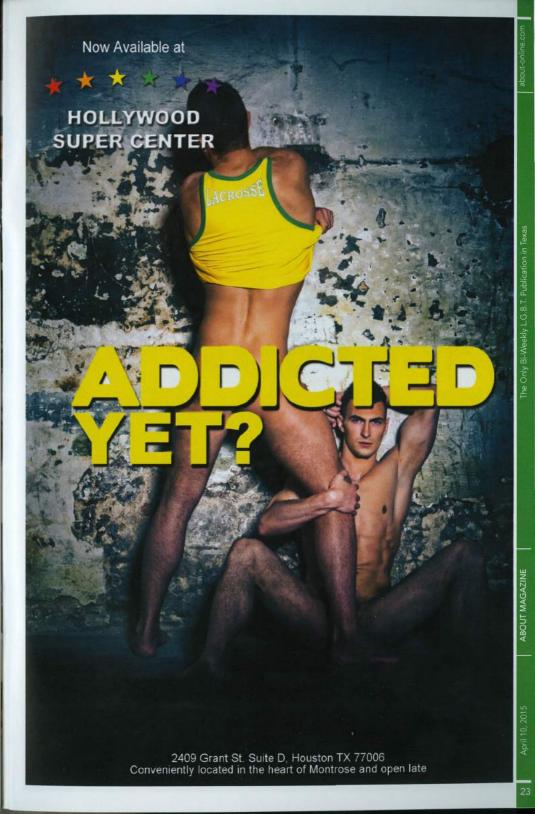


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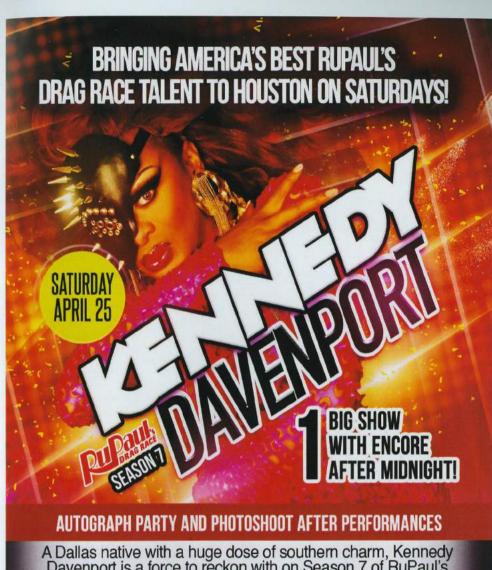




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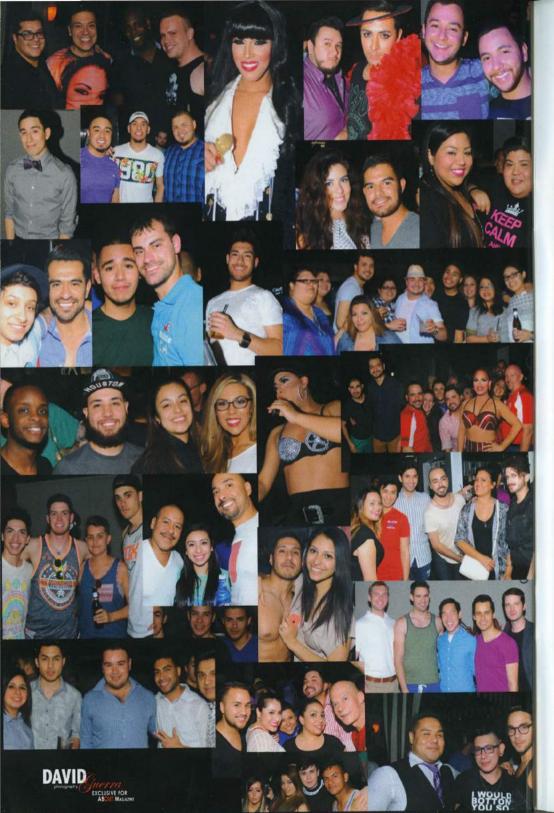
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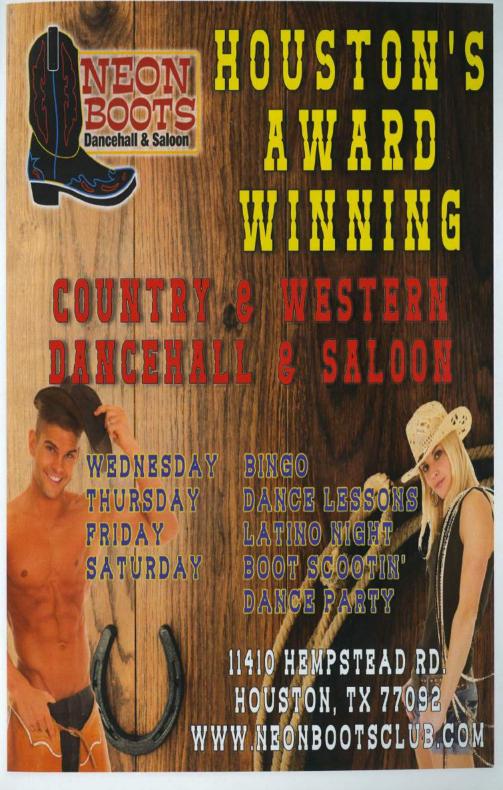
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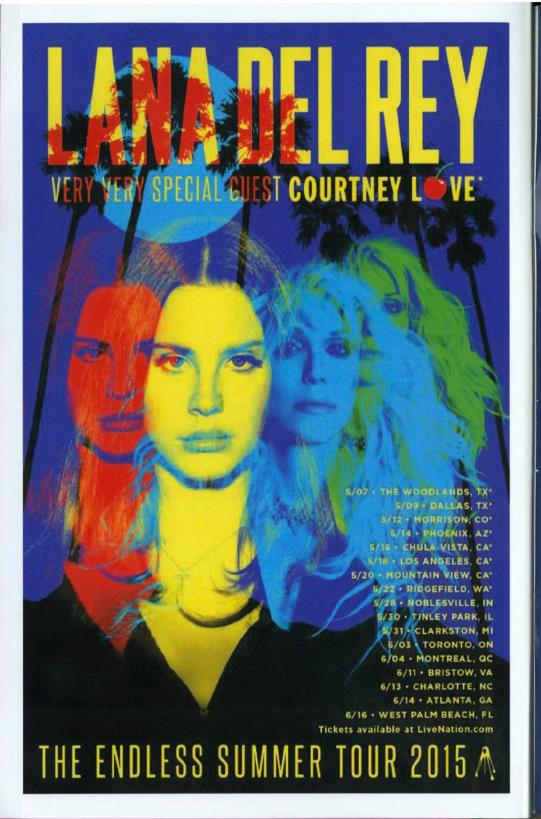
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