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FROM THE GAY BAR TO THE SEARCH BAR:
PROMISCUITY, IDENTITY, AND QUEER MOBILITY ON GRINDR

by

Chase S. Aunspach

A THESIS

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University of Nebraska, 2015

Advisor: Carly S. Woods

This thesis is a critical exploration into the mobile application Grindr and how it rhetorically constitutes its users and their experience of queer spaces. Recently, researchers from a variety of disciplines have displayed increased scholarly interest in Grindr. Despite this much needed attention, few studies before this thesis have examined Grindr's material structure—its interface, scripts, and other design features—as rhetorical and worthy of analysis. I document and interrogate my own experiences as a user of the application, adding a humanistic perspective to current conversations about Grindr to demonstrate one potential approach to critiquing mobile media that extends the “field” of rhetorical field methods to include the digital. I investigate how Grindr individualizes and channels one's involvement with queer communities and desire by quite literally constructing gay users as the center of queer spaces that were once exclusively physical and communal.

In addition to studying the static, material structures of Grindr, I explore how Grindr provides resources to challenge (homo)normativity. I argue Grindr's promiscuous mobility and relatively easy access offer queer men new opportunities for passing that exceed the homonormative confinements built into the application. Reviving Douglas Crimp's (1987) efforts to reclaim promiscuity, I example how the word is a useful

heuristic that illuminates forms of movement like passing that remain understudied since the “mobilities turn.” Through vignettes recounting my Grindr experience, I highlight five aspects of movement potentially silenced when mobility is taken as a dominant perspective over promiscuity. Though Grindr allows greater access to promiscuity than previous queer spaces, it still possesses limitations. Thus, I conclude this thesis by putting my analysis of Grindr into action. By reimagining Grindr through a framework Gehl (2015) labels “critical reverse engineering,” I propose pragmatic changes to the coding of the application that, if enacted, may address many of this project’s critiques and make Grindr a more just “queer world” for its users.

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On a different note, I certainly wouldn't be at this juncture today if my family didn't fully support me for the man-loving, sassy, computer-hogging loud mouth that I am. Your candor and kindness are the stuff enjoyable human beings and good scholarship are made of. And finally, thank you to Anthony Fucci. Though I typed every sentence of this thesis, I can almost guarantee he could recite this document from memory. His patience, quick (if quiet) wit, and other-worldly tolerance of my need to read aloud as I edit grew this project and its author in ways that escape proper description.

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Chapter 1: Introducing and Accessing Grindr

I'm sitting in front of the computer with Dick Clark cheering in the background as some now washed-up celebrity shouts, "Happy New Year!" Pacing back and forth in our trailer's laminate kitchen, I await responses to my most recent Facebook note and Myspace blog. Perhaps it's too neo-Millennial, but this is how I came out of the closet as a living, breathing homosexual in 2007. Hailing from a relatively small town and thus serving as Dallas County, Iowa's, only proof that queers indeed exist (and now are out about it apparently), the mass visibility of what essentially amounts to an identity press release felt right. Efficient even. But most of all safe.

I recognize that it is with an incredible amount of privilege I can reflect upon coming out in both my digital and social networks as more of a silly formality than an act of survival. In hindsight, I consider myself to have been fairly out for three years before the big announcement. In the wilderness that was Myspace in the mid-2000s, I found a network of other gay teens who were just as vibrantly chatty and impeccably selfie-driven. Looking back at these haphazard acquaintances, the circumference of the connections invariably narrowed as time passed, eventually linking me to other gays in Iowa (plenty of miles away from me) and making the leap from Myspace to the intimate and shiny new Facebook. One by one, I received friend requests from many different (closeted) teens and thought nothing of the act, recognizing most of them from comments and likes on mutual gay friends' posts. Through the surveying of friend lists and the calculation of an individual's informal ratio of gay-to-straight mutual contacts, I could peer into the closets of those around me and vice versa. We were gay by association. I could see them; they could see me, and no one had to know, at least until I told them.

After graduating high school and dating in my first couple of years of college, I moved my gayness (back) to the Internet. Starting with formal sites like OkCupid, I once again found myself potentially surrounded by gay men in various stages of outness, as searchably close as one mile from my zip code. Wading through profile after profile, I noticed some mentioned their usernames on Grindr. Grindr? An open tab, Google search, and download from the Android Market later, I accessed Grindr and felt as if I had a portal to the gay community sitting in my hand. I could scroll page after page as tiny squares of torsos and semi-tasteful mirror pictures glided vertically up my phone's screen. Though this may have been my first encounter with Grindr circa 2011, it would not be my last.

It is reasonable to see how such past experiences have honed my critical sensibilities to the relationship between gayness, technology, mobility, and identity. Having lived and clicked simultaneously from within the closet and out in plain sight, I believe Grindr marks a congealment of a slow-moving shift in the relationship between these four topics. How so? This thesis explores one potential thread of explanation, arguing Grindr's social and material interfaces are a contemporary mechanism that constructs gay identities and their relationships to queer spaces, simultaneously limiting and allowing users to engage in a fluid promiscuity that puts queerness and desire in motion.

At this point, though, a formal introduction to Grindr and this thesis is warranted. In this introductory chapter, I describe in more detail Grindr as a mobile application, as well as the current research surrounding it and its use. After explaining how this project marks a critical and rhetorical addition to recent Grindr scholarship, I clarify how the

methods I utilize to analyze the application blend previous work in human computer interaction with contemporary, *in situ* approaches to rhetorical criticism. These conversations pair nicely and provide me the space and language necessary to infuse my experiences as a Grindr user with my insights as a critic about Grindr's constitutive and promiscuous possibilities. I then conclude by providing a brief overview of how the remainder of this thesis unfolds.

What is Grindr?

Grindr is a locative, mobile application primarily marketed as a way to hook up and form relationships for men who have sex with men (MSM). I will switch between describing users as gay and MSM, much in the same way users flow between realms of outness and gay identification, since many men of various sexual identities access the application. Grindr differs from many previous gay websites and technologies due to its reliance on the global positioning system (GPS). Grindr is a geo-social application that “provides context-aware services that help associate location with users and content” (Vicente, Freni, Bettini, & Jensen, 2011, p. 20). Essentially, Grindr aggregates the geographic data of all individuals who are logged on to generate a list of profiles near the user's physical presence. They are then sorted on the interface of a user's home screen on the basis of closeness. In effect, this highly mobile system provides men over the age of 18 instantaneous access to a structured and contextually-based network of men who have sex with men.

Created in 2009, Grindr currently boasts over 7 million users with up to 300,000 men logged into Grindr at any given time (Grindr LLC, 2013). Users are located in 192 countries with the United States, United Kingdom, and France containing the most

profiles (over 2.9 million, 1.2 million, and 511,000 users respectively). There is something sexy and attention commanding about this application for members, evidenced by the average user logging in eight times a day for a cumulative total of two hours. So what is it about Grindr that attracts users? I propose it is the customer-centered experience of queer space fostered by Grindr. Before I can unpack the implications of such an individualized experience, though, a description of Grindr's interface is needed

One User's Depiction. After downloading Grindr for free onto your mobile device or tablet, you are prompted to create an account associated with an e-mail address. Once you have completed this step and appeased a few confirmation screens, you are taken to the main page of Grindr, a vertically scrolling, three-wide list of square boxes showcasing individual profiles. Besides nudity and solicitation, virtually anything goes for profile pictures. Dingy mirror pictures, shots of headless chests and torsos, smiling portraits, non-human objects, pop culture figures, and blank, grey blocks glide by as you explore the users around you.

As previously mentioned, these profiles populate in relation to their GPS location. Those at the top of the list and nearest to your own square in the top left-hand corner are geographically closer to you, perhaps by miles or a few feet. When clicking on a profile, this massive grid transitions into a larger rendering of the selected profile's picture, coupled with the user's distance and age. A white circle encourages the user to tap into the extended profile which provides more detailed information including a user's weight, height, relationship status, race, body type, and "tribe," a new feature of Grindr that allows users to self-identity into sub-groups of the gay community under labels like jocks, bears, or as HIV-positive. At the top of their profile, a user may write a small

blurb, as well as within a larger text box that appears below the demographic information previously described. And on the bottom of a profile page, if GPS reporting is enabled, a user's distance from you is again listed in terms of feet or miles, including a down-to-the-minute estimate of how long it may take to reach this person by walking, driving, or taking a plane.

Users are then invited to instant message one another in private, dyadic chats. In searching for potential interlocutors to contact, users can edit the kind of men they see on the main grid through filters that rearrange Grindr's interface on the basis of one's preferred age range, distance, race, and any other demographic characteristic mentioned previously. This search optimization drastically affects who is seen as a user. Profiles with settings outside of the parameters of another's filter disappear from the home screen and can only be accessed once the filter or hidden profile's settings are changed. Grindr is programmed to only show the nearest 100 profiles to a non-paying user, encouraging potential customers to filter or purchase "Grindr Xtra," a subscription to the application that allows greater filtering options and 200 more men to be shown on the home screen.

Both Grindr's attention gaining format and its rampant usage in the gay community may help explain its role in habitual "checking" (Meijer & Kormelink, 2014). Though Meijer and Kormlink are working from the lens of digital journalism, they observe that Grindr is one of many applications that fall into an engagement pattern called "checking cycles," where a user constantly looks at his or her phone for new content. This habit can be hard to break; I still find myself instinctively opening Grindr on my phone and refreshing the screen, updating my location and reshuffling the profiles just to see who may be gay around me. This repeated action of "checking" points toward

a deep association between users and their constitution as consumers through Grindr's digitally-driven performativity. Others have only recently begun exploring the close relationship between users, identity, and Grindr, which I discuss below.

Locating Other Perspectives on Grindr

As a relatively recent cultural text and phenomenon, research on Grindr is limited in nature, though the number of papers published or uploaded in 2013 through March 2015 indicates a growing scholarly interest. Unfortunately, the majority of the literature addressing “Grindr” isn't actually about Grindr itself; instead, these studies focus on understanding human behavior through Grindr. Instead of making Grindr the object of analysis, it is appropriated as a method to reach gay populations. Studies of this type typically fall into three camps: health, relationships, and general use.

To date, public health researchers have primarily used Grindr as a place for sampling (Burrell et al., 2012; Rice et al., 2012; Landovitz et al., 2013). Noting that men who have sex with men are much easier to recruit through this geographically specific portal, Grindr makes an accessible and localized sampling mechanism. It should be cautioned, though, that this type of health research risks reaffirming already held stereotypes of gay men as sexual deviants or diseased. Titling Grindr a “novel, high risk sexual marketplace” (like Rudy & Beymer, 2012) isn't necessarily incorrect, but using such language should give pause. In short, this type of research shares little in common methodologically with this project, but both health researchers and I take interest in how Grindr is a space of promiscuity that deserves further exploration.

Relationship formation and communication is also a popular area of research involving Grindr. In disciplines ranging from education (Reddick, 2012) to

communication studies (Blackwell, Birnholtz, & Abbott, 2014), scholars have taken interest in the way gay men court each other on Grindr. Many of these studies focus on U.S. contexts, but some are also international in scope including the U.K. (Bauermeister, Yeagley, Meanley, & Pingel, 2014) and Hong Kong (Wong, 2012). Van De Wiele and Tong's (2014) extensive quantitative report on Grindr problematizes popular beliefs about why users log on to Grindr. Users' motivations for accessing Grindr coalesced into six general categories: social inclusion/approval, sex, friendship/networking, romantic relationships, entertainment, and location-based searching. Such findings indicate men are opening the application for more than casual sex, even though Van De Wiele and Tong admit hooking up is a dominant form of gratification for users. Much like the previously described health research, these relational factors inform this project. Specifically, Van De Wiele and Tong point toward Grindr serving larger, constitutive functions in users' lives, and this project aims to explore how Grindr's interface facilitates these uses, promiscuous or otherwise.

Research has also looked broadly at Grindr users and the application's subsequent renegotiation of space. It is the ability of Grindr to queer hetero/homosexual and digital/material spaces that has aroused the interest of many scholars in education, media studies, and critical geography (Bettani, 2015; Qian, 2014; Doran, 2014; Handel, Birnholtz, & Shklovski, 2014; Kojima, 2014). Because Grindr is accessible anywhere data service is available, gay individuals can enter gay space instantaneously and privately for the first time. A general consensus suggests optimism that heteronormativity may be challenged through applications like Grindr. I agree with this position, arguing later in this thesis that locative media like Grindr provide spaces of promiscuity that

trouble hetero/homonormative calls for stillness, piety, and marriage. However, I also elucidate a cautious skepticism about such cheerful victory cries due to the capitalistic drive of Grindr. Taken together, Grindr can be understood as a messy application full of vulnerabilities and possibilities that deserve further analysis.

The intimate connection between gay individuals and their use of Grindr has also been explored. Qualitative interviews about the processes of joining (Dodge, 2014) and leaving Grindr (Brubaker, Ananny, & Crawford, 2014) have found that men who have sex with men engage and disassociate themselves with Grindr for complex, personal reasons. It isn't an easy application to stop opening. Brubaker and colleagues found that leaving Grindr was not as simple as uninstalling it from one's device. A negotiation of community, identity, and interpersonal relationships pushed users to wither away from their reliance on the application and sometimes cycle back into use. I believe it is the format of Grindr and its explorative, individualizing construction of gay space and community that hooks users and sustains the application's performative role in gay men's lives.

Generally, these lines of research are closer to the goals of this project, though few take a critical perspective. Without accounting for dynamics of power, some of the described studies can participate in a normalization of the problematic structures and social relations this thesis questions. Both politically and theoretically, I contribute a missing and pragmatic voice about Grindr. Instead of focusing on how relationships are formed or anonymous sex is solicited on Grindr, I take interest in this media as a text, illustrating how the application assembles possibilities for mobility and identities are constituted through the use of Grindr itself. I provide further scrutiny and discussion of

two critically minded essays by Batiste and Crooks that match the goals and orientation of this thesis.

Batiste (2013) proposes that Grindr reinscribes heteronormative space with that of gayness, a topic already outlined by others discussed above. He names this process “queer cartography,” a “diagrammatic representation of the spatial arrangements and distributions of queer individuals—in this case, gay men—and the physical features of the ways in which they claim, utilize and shape the landscape of a geographical area” (p. 130). In providing this language, Batiste argues men on Grindr are forming a version of homotopia, rendering heterosexual individuals invisible.

Though differing in approach, this project aims to acknowledge the positive potential of Grindr, as Batiste does, to change the texture of not just heteronormative geographies but of gay-normative space as well. Additionally, this thesis questions to what extent Grindr actually inspires collective political action. I propose that Grindr privately aggregates the in-group visibility of gay users but fails to translate it into public consciousness. By individualizing gay space and user experience, Grindr gives the illusion of the radical queer potential described by Batiste but is designed to continuously fall short in delivering action outside of dyadic communication.

I more closely align with Crooks (2013), whose autoethnographic analysis of tensions and questions on/of Grindr serves as a jumping off point and model for this project. Speaking from his general sense of Grindr and its users, Crooks articulates three areas for future exploration on the application: embodiment and inscription, the relationship between heteronormative space and gay villages, and a shift in social scripts about desire. Crooks’s article rings true to much of my experience, and academically, I

expand upon all three topics of his analysis. As scaffolding for this project, Crooks's observations operate as the effect, while I hone in on the material and digital processes that are creating his and many others' experiences. A driving research question of mine asks, "How does Grindr afford the incidents Crooks documents?" By analyzing the actual structures of Grindr and the apparatuses generating and limiting gay space and interactions, this project pairs nicely with Crooks's to more usefully concretize the means by which the homonormalization of desire is happening.

Sharing My Position

As I've documented, research about and through Grindr can be sorted into three semi-discrete orientations: Grindr and health, Grindr and relationships, and Grindr and users. I enter the conversation surrounding Grindr with a different subject in mind—Grindr itself. Most studies published to date have used interviews or surveys to examine Grindr's impact with gay users. However, I hope to better triangulate these findings by including a critical, rhetorical critique of the application and its discourses, reflecting on how Grindr is a structured space with performativities that dis/allow certain identities to be rendered intelligible (Chávez, 2012). I believe it is through the flows of Grindr that possibilities for interaction, ecstasy, promiscuity, and the reconfiguration of heteronormative space are forged. These potentials, though, are stifled due to the homonormative ideology latent within Grindr's design.

I maintain that Grindr argues; it orients, positions, deflects, and seduces users to view their world through its lens. Endres and Senda-Cook (2011) contend physical places can argue and wield rhetoric alongside people. Why not digital places as well? Grindr, much like the trails Senda-Cook (2012) traverses, possesses flows, tensions, procedures,

and rhetorics that provide and shape our experiences and understandings through use. By drawing this material connection, I expand the field beyond that which is clearly delineated as the physical into the digital. Doing so provides new methods and terrains of theorizing within this growing shift toward more empirical methods.

Furthermore, I argue Grindr exemplifies a renewed, if troubled, promiscuity. Promiscuity, often thought of as a negative social behavior in the U.S., undergirds the insistent movement of queer individuals. Whether sneakily having sex, running from bashers, passing in public, traveling to gayborhoods, or cruising in bathhouses, queers historically expressed themselves and still exist in highly mobile ways. Though location-based media and its erosion of the material/digital divide has warranted increased attention in communication studies (Frith, 2012; de Souza e Silva & Frith, 2010), I argue that the current shift toward a mobilities paradigm does not always sufficiently capture similar movements and moments of queerness brought forth by Grindr. This thesis offers attention and a reclamation of promiscuity as a way to normalize non-monogamous sexual expression, to generate grounded theories of “safer” digital and locative media practices, and to complicate the privileges articulated in some mobilities research, most notably the ignoring and minimizing of queer experiences, existences, and spaces unable to live “out” and safely in a homophobic public. Mobility is central to queerness, and likewise, queerness needs to be reflected in the mobilities paradigm.

Current research has engaged sexuality and mobility by examining how cities, bars, and sex workers participate in the sexual ecosystems of cities (Hubbard, 2011; Atkins & Laing, 2012; Nash & Gorman-Murray, 2014). Grindr expands the scope of these conversations past the urban and into the digital. In this “mobilities turn,” I argue

attention must be paid to the movement of vulnerable, political (queer) desires and the constellations of bodies and materials articulating them, since queerness has always been mobile. Thus, to better account for the fluid, sexual nature of mobility, I offer promiscuity as a term, behavior, and lens that can better sensitize critics to these issues and illuminate the experiences of those who may not always be visible.

The Interface of Rhetoric and Technology

In addition to contributing to the growing scholarly interest about Grindr, this thesis also enters into a methodological movement within rhetoric and technology. As hinted at previously, I analyze Grindr on two levels. One is structural, peeking into the material frameworks and affordances provided by the coding and flows programmed into the very DNA of Grindr. The other is more theoretical, complicating the concepts of passing and networked mobility by examining my own experience as promiscuous and useful. Taken together, I approach Grindr politically and rhetorically as more than a site of hopeless raunchiness or a new means for homo-romantic disclosure. Instead, I uphold Grindr as a current iteration of a promiscuous gay space that is both mobile and created by the structural, material items that make up the application itself. In my assessment, this move expands *in situ* approaches to rhetorical sites like memorials (Blair, Jeppeson, & Pucci, 1991) or sculptures (Zagacki & Gdallagher, 2009) digitally by looking at Grindr's interface. Consequentially, I concurrently enter the conversation about mobile interfaces and their criticism from a new angle, forefronting rhetoric and politics in what has largely been a functionalist discussion.

To appreciate this pivot, it is useful to understand how mobile interfaces have been criticized previously. I trace moves in studying mediated interfaces through the field

of human computer interaction (HCI). Scholars concerned with HCI historically viewed and analyzed user interfaces as a means to a productive, user-experience optimization end. Simply put, interfaces were the point of contact between machines and users, and critiques of these spaces were done from the realm of usability. Function and efficiency drove (and more often than not, still drive) the scholarship. Questions like “How clear were the instructions?” and “What functions can be added to improve user experience?” are representative of the effort. Taking a functionalist view, many writing in HCI concern(ed) themselves with the strict transfer of information or services, rendering devices as the channels to move knowledge with the highest fidelity possible. Though in a separate field, this approach closely mirrors debates about the nature of discourse in communication studies as well, a classical dialectic between the conduit model of communication and the relational model of communication

Some HCI scholars have moved away from this narrow view. An aesthetic turn, described by Bertelsen and Pold (2004), asks scholars and practitioners to steer their attention away from usability and into the symbolic. Bertelsen and Pold acknowledge that interface criticism from an aesthetic standpoint isn't for everyone, since it takes a fair amount of literary or artistic training. They uphold, though, that the enterprise of aesthetic criticism is worthwhile since it can feed meta-theoretical, historical, and functional perspectives. Numerous spaces and topoi for analysis are proposed by the pair like tracing stylistic references, generic analysis, interrogating the production of representations, examining the hybridity of computers and culture, and determining the materiality and remediation of an interface with other media.

Bertelson and Pold's areas for analysis are pushed forward by this project as an attempt to demonstrate and invite others in communication studies to focus more intensely on interfaces. Grindr and this thesis play within many of these topoi, probing the production of experiences, gay spaces, and mobilities on Grindr and theorizing how the material interface of the application offers potentials for increased same-sex connection while fostering normalizing relationships in the process. The appreciation side of aesthetic criticism is not enough, just as it wasn't enough for public address scholars. In conjunction with HCI, a move away from beauty and light will tease out political workings at stake, and as rhetoricians already sensitized to audiences, discourse, and power, we in communication studies already possess numerous fruitful vocabularies to describe the workings of mobile interfaces. It is time to treat interfaces and their rhetoric as world-making, as opposed to functional. As such, I conduct a close-reading of Grindr and its interface in Chapter Two to unmask and untangle discourses situated within these every day texts.

Though I discuss the interface as if it is a solid, manageable thing, this simply isn't the case. Grindr is comprised of a smattering of words, images, procedures, and affective experiences. Thus, it is only appropriate to tinker on this project with tools that can capture and contemplate the application's full impact. As a frequent lurker and user of Grindr, it just is not possible or honest to state I am compartmentalizing bits of my experience and history in this project. To take into account these affective, presence-created factors, I believe rhetorical field methods serve as an appropriate and friendly foundation from which this project and others critically examining mobile applications can grow. Specifically, my use of autoethnography proves itself to be well-suited to

digital environments since interfaces like Grindr's are experienced in such personalized way.

In the chapters that follow, I continuously make my user experience within the workflows and culture of Grindr the text of my analysis. However, I do not plan to interrogate these artifacts without context. The combination of auto/ethnographic research and rhetorical criticism I employ falls in line with recent work by Middleton, Senda-Cook and Endres (2011) on rhetorical field methods. Placing itself at the intersections of ethnography, performance studies, and rhetorical scholarship, rhetorical field methods takes seriously McGee's (1990) call for rhetorical critics to serve as both text creators and text analyzers. The fragmented and multi-sensory nature of Grindr makes rhetorical field methods an appropriate approach, down to its very definition. As explained in the previously cited article by Middleton, Senda-Cook, and Endres, rhetorical field methods' mixture of traditional rhetorical and ethnographic methods "confirms, challenges, or complicates a rhetorician's conception of a rhetorical practice" (p. 134) like Grindr's. Though it makes for a messier analysis, I include past interactions on and through Grindr in this thesis, as well as unsolicited comments I received from other users on a profile that listed no information besides my age. I believe this mixture of openness is needed to fully contemplate Grindr.

This project expands the scope and implications of rhetorical field methods to date by inviting its "field" into digitality. Many projects have approached rhetorical field methods *in situ*, moving away from the office and into rhetorical experiences themselves. While such a change is valuable and long overdue, it doesn't fully encapsulate the experience and rhetorics of mobile technologies. These projects, on some level, assume

there is a specific site of rhetorical action that the critic can snapshot, analyze, and publish. Grindr, as a mobile and constantly changing text, pushes against this trend and actively treats the digital and material as essentially synonymous in analysis.

Methodologically, critics may have to ask themselves just where the text creation and analysis begin and end. Is it at a scheduled time? When the participants say so? As you're traveling to the protest? When? The ubiquitous nature of Grindr implicates the critic as always participating in the reception, creation, and criticism of rhetoric, whether that's at home, at work, or in motion. In short, Grindr and other digital texts stretch the rhetorical fields of immanence, vulnerability, and affect (McHendry, Middleton, Endres, Senda-Cook, & O'Byrne, 2014) to be "always on and always on you" (Turkle, 2008).

Much like Gehl's (2014) ethnographic work on the Dark Web Social Network (DWSN), I understand myself as a digital participant, observer, and scholar of Grindr, and it is from this insider/outsider status I problematize Grindr as an articulation for both queer potentialities and homonormative anxieties. By accepting Grindr as a place and identity-making machine, my goal is to buttress such previous "extratextual" (Middleton, Senda-Cook & Endres, 2011, p. 397) experiences with the language of visual, interface, procedural, and textual criticism, contributing a bridge between these seemingly discrete methodological perspectives. I offer this project to others asking similar questions of interfaces and mobility as one attempt at a promiscuous synthesis. Below, I describe how this thesis approaches such a goal.

Work Overview

In this chapter, I have introduced and discussed Grindr from a variety of perspectives. Moving through the user experience, as well as evidencing the application's

extensive usage by men who have sex with men, it is clear that Grindr is having a significant impact on queer communities. I have also explored current research about Grindr, witnessing most scholarship's focus on minority health interventions and interpersonal communication. I evidenced how my rhetorical orientation complicates and strengthens the insights from these perspectives. Finally, I have demonstrated how a grounded, *in situ* approach to Grindr is a needed contribution to this conversation, bridging methodological gaps in the realms of interface analysis, mobilities studies, and rhetorical field methods.

Chapter Two addresses Grindr and its workflows directly. I begin by discussing theoretically how others have imagined the way rhetoric and procedures, like Grindr's interface, constitute users' identities and their possible modes of (inter)action. I suggest Grindr is a contemporary iteration of gay space, which affects the intelligibility of one's identity. In practice, Grindr builds a mobile, queer space that limits and offers new means of connection between gay individuals. However, this fresh form of gay space is individually-centered, marking a swift difference from previous experiences. The remainder of this analysis documents and analyzes how such an individualized space is constructed. The structures of Grindr—its design choices and algorithms for rendering profiles in relation to users' proximities— are explored. Also, the tools provided by Grindr to customize user experience are problematized. The implications of Grindr's atomized gay space round out the chapter.

Chapter Three moves past the confining interpellations described in the previous pages and explores the promiscuous potentials Grindr affords users. To better apprehend the movement of Grindr and its queers, I survey the current scholarship on mobilities.

One such mobility Grindr offers users is increased fluidity between queer and heteronormative spaces through the act of “passing.” I argue passing is a form of mobility that has received inadequate scholarly attention. To account for queer mobilities like passing that are missing in the literature or not yet explored, I reclaim the word “promiscuity” as an organizing term for future use, exploring how queer theorists and others deployed promiscuity with success. I then note five areas of consideration promiscuity opens, exemplifying their usefulness through autoethnographic vignettes capturing my real experience as a Grindr user. Gendered and racial implications of such an attempt to revive promiscuity close the discussion.

Chapter Four puts the findings of this thesis to work. I navigate the challenge Hess (2011) issues to rhetoricians to “give back” to the communities we study by performing what Gehl (2015) terms “critical reverse engineering.” As a practice, critical reverse engineering deconstructs objects to rebuild them in more socially just ways. I explore how such a refashioned Grindr might work in its next iteration. After pragmatically providing solutions to the problems explored in Chapter Two, I acknowledge additional on-going conversations this project engages, like the impact of homonormativity on gay identity, before rearticulating my scholarly contributions. I conclude by imagining ways this thesis may set in motion the potential for Grindr to build queerer, more ethical worlds.

Chapter 2: Grindr's Constitution of Identity and Gay Space

“I wasn’t expecting to have this conversation tonight,” huffed Kevin while fighting with his employee and newly-moved in boyfriend Patrick during the season finale of the gay-centered HBO dramedy *Looking*. This “conversation” is initiated by Patrick after the couple attends a party at a neighbor’s apartment. At said shindig, Patrick joins a group of new acquaintances as they huddle around a man’s phone, attempting to match men in attendance to their Grindr profiles. In this moment, Patrick recognizes a pictureless profile as Kevin and is upset since he is using Grindr without telling Patrick. Kevin admits to utilizing Grindr as both a means of seeing who is gay around him, as well as a space for sexual opportunities. Under the impression they are strictly monogamous, Patrick is hurt and confused by this behavior since he never intended to have an open relationship. In Kevin’s mind, Grindr, steam rooms, and tearooms are all the same— spaces of potential where confidential and randomized pleasure may be shared. Patrick maintains this is cheating; Kevin argues such opportunities for sexual contact like kissing and spontaneous fellating will happen naturally and in the spur of the moment and that their relationship should be open, honest, and flexible about these desires.

Though the series was cancelled the day after this episode aired (Brathwaite, 2015), Patrick and Kevin’s fight easily illustrates some of the tensions, anxieties, and possibilities surrounding Grindr. In the course of their spat, Kevin gives voice to many of the arguments of this thesis. In essence, we both contend Grindr is a site of (sexual) potential that mirrors and differs from previous places of promiscuity like locker rooms and bathhouses. Informally, gay spaces may have been the private bedroom of two or

more men or a gathering like that Kevin and Patrick attend in the episode. However, Grindr should be recognized and historicized as a gay space as well.

The formal territorialization of this mobile gayness can be cited as congealing in 1950s cities as gayborhoods, which offered many opportunities to the gay community and its acts of resistance while hurting the poor and people of color (Brown, 2014). Gay business owners would buy inexpensive properties in poor areas and gentrify them, updating them into businesses or residences of an openly gay persuasion. These projects were profitable and political, much like Grindr. In use, gayborhoods became geographic sites for identification and collective action, a safe(r) place for cruising and visibility with minimized stigmatization within a homophobic city's limits, a viable political aim within itself (Brouwer, 1998).

On a smaller scale, gay and lesbian bars have served many of the same spatial functions as the full-scale gayborhood. These establishments obviously cannot stand in for the power of carrying out everyday life in the presence of other gay individuals. However, as smaller refuges, they often function as the only financially viable opportunity for many individuals to experience queer space as shielded by formal, protective barriers for its patrons. I argue Grindr follows suit. However, gay bars should not be uncritically held up as model spaces for community organizing either. They can also fall victim to the creation of homonormativity (Duggan, 2002), sexism (Johnson & Samdahl, 2005), and transphobia (Rupp & Taylor, 2003). As a whole, misogyny and disregard for women and the feminine can run rampant in gay bars. Without acknowledgment of the abundant problematic discourses and behaviors that have plagued the gay community for years, we risk only further erasing minority voices and

experiences from the gay imaginary. Gay bars simply are not without problems. The same holds true with Grindr.

I partially agree with Crooks (2013) that “the app [Grindr] does nothing to advance the other aims of the founding of gay villages, namely the political project or the affective aims of alternative community” (p. 7). Grindr may not be static and visible like traditional gay villages, but it very closely follows some of the unjust political practices of these gay spaces. They both support gay liberation but also the subsequent subordination of people who are poor, feminine, or of color. Looking back at these traditional spaces of gayness can be a positive reminder of the vulnerability and agency produced by unapologetically making queerness a public touchstone both materially (Berlant & Warner, 1998) and visually (Morris and Sloop, 2006). However, even spaces assumed to no longer be so threatening to heterosexuality like gay bars and gayborhoods can be coopted, policed, or erased through zoning practices. As Bell and Binnie (2004) document, queer spaces have often maintained a strained relationship with individuals in power and neoliberalism generally, simultaneously existing as Other and novel marketing ploys when convenient and profitable. Grindr, I argue, is but one additional iteration of “queers in space” (Ingram, Bouthillette, & Retter, 1997), grappling with the always present “issues of access, demonstration, memory, and representation” (Ingram, 1993, p. 19) in a new terrain: a simultaneously material and digital form.

I discuss both the history and the politics of Grindr as a gay space because it works as an interface to multiple relationships. Grindr mediates the connection between an individual and collective gay space. It also structures the links one user has with others and with the self. Digital interfaces function much in the same way Zagacki and

Gallagher (2009) think of the interfaces of sculptures. Social and material relationships are explored, performed, strained, and maintained as a person navigates and participates in an interface. Whether this interface is a monument (Ewalt, 2011; Dunn, 2014), a national park (Senda-Cook, 2012), a museum and its exhibits (Woods, Ewalt, & Baker, 2013), or a mobile application (as this thesis argues), rhetoric frames and constitutes the user and their (im)possibilities of movement within multiple material, historical, and power-latent fields.

The rhetorical study of procedure has recently received a renewed interest due to Ian Bogost's (2007) coining of "procedural rhetoric." Bogost relates his shift into the subdomain of procedure to that of visual rhetoricians—that a new vocabulary is needed to understand how arguments are arranged through processes. Video games and computing drive much of Bogost's defining of and imagination toward procedural rhetoric. In general, Bogost's curiosity about "how things work" resonates with the goals of this thesis. Though Grindr is outside the field of game studies, procedural rhetoric offers a home to a variety of other techno-social processes if the scope and application of the term is expanded within rhetorical studies. Stated another way, procedural rhetoric decenters the individual rhetor to show how non-human rules and structures can proposition users to perform within ideologically-situated positions. The rules of social and procedural technologies are plenty rhetorical and subject constituting without the baggage of a single rhetor.

Of course, the idea that processes are rhetorical is not a new one. Murray Edelman (1988) took interest in the strategic deployment of procedure in bureaucracies years before Bogost. His interest in bureaucratic scripts and their interaction with publics

mirrors this project's, though it's in some ways inverse. Edelman elaborates that individual actors within a governmental institution call upon scripts that give them the illusion of making decisions to help or serve the public, when in reality, their range of options is limited by procedure from the first utterance. However, their actual carrying out of said plans are mystified by the use of bureaucracy, absolving both the workers and elites of responsibility. The same is true of coders and users of mobile applications; though both affect and are affected by material interfaces, their hands are washed clean by focusing solely on procedures. This chapter corrects this trend by pointing out places on Grindr where procedures mystify the ideological nature of their settings.

One effect of the procedural rhetoric of interfaces is the constitution of (collective) identities and thus their social positions. A committed Marxist and rhetorician, McGee (1980) famously saw a connection between rhetoric and ideology and noted that individuals are socialized by societies to use the vocabulary of seemingly "ordinary language terms" as a condition for belonging. In essence, the (ideologically) constitutive function of language becomes an important action of rhetoric.

Drawing upon Althusser's (1972) work on interpellation and the logical entrapment that institutions can create for subjects, Charland (1987) also asserts that audiences are always called into being and constrained by the very use of rhetoric. He explains, "Interpellation occurs at the very moment one enters into a rhetorical situation, that is, as soon as an individual recognizes and acknowledges being addressed" (p. 139). This differs widely from worldviews that believe audience members are rational actors who are simply persuaded into believing A over B, whether through logical proofs or complex gamification, as Bogost would maintain. Rather, Althusser, McGee (1975), and

Charland contend that free will is a mythic side effect of interpellation and constitutive rhetoric. In a Marxist tradition, they situate the ideologies undergirding interpellation and constitutive rhetoric in the material “because subjects enact their ideology and reconstitute their material world in its image” (Charland, 1987, p. 143). This project takes Charland’s observation seriously and digitally, for it is through Grindr’s procedural, constitutive interface that the material practices of its users are enacted. By working through Grindr’s procedural rhetorics, this project unites interface analysis, procedural rhetoric, and constitutive rhetoric into a coherent vocabulary to describe the rhetorical force of seemingly every day aspects of mobile applications. The repeated, mobile enactments of Grindr users make an important place for analysis, since such policies and interactions affect the very “we”-ness of gayness.

The constitutive, repetitive nature of interfaces and procedures aligns nicely with performativity. Though Butler speaks directly of the corporeal enactment of gender, her insights about identity generally are germane. Butler (1988) writes:

The act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again. (p. 526)

When applied to Grindr, Butler’s observations hold true. Scripts (both coded and social) are external to their users, but the identity of “user” is only brought into being by a script’s enactment, its performance. The continuous repetition of queers interacting with Grindr’s interface normalizes this relationship between a user and their scripted social

position until it feels “natural,” nonconscious, or performative, as evidenced by users logging into Grindr on average of eight times daily (Grindr LLC, 2013). Thus, it is through the use of applications like Grindr the ideological, constitutive functions of procedural rhetorics transpire performatively.

While Butler discusses physical enactment, I consider both the materiality of computing and the discursiveness of Grindr as text. In their introduction to *No Caption Needed*, Hariman and Lucaites (2007) argue that visual rhetorics and (religious) icons are “used to orient the individual within a context of collective identity, obligation, and power” (p. 1) Visual rhetorics provide formal and vernacular resources for groups to understand themselves as a collective whole. Interfaces, procedures, identities, and iconic visual rhetorics are all “restored behaviors.” Put differently, constitutive rhetorics are made intelligible through the lens of well-established knowledges and rituals already existing within a culture, and in the comprehension of their performances, these rhetorics reproduce the scripts used to ascribe their meaning, or as Edwards and Winkler (1997) would call this phenomenon, a “representative form.”

Specifically on Grindr, this representative form is based on an original conceptualization of how gay space should look (Edwards & Winkler) and users within it should behave (Bogost, Edelman, & Butler). Grindr, in its use, is a site of (re)production, providing homonormative interpellations for identification through performances that fit or “make sense” because in their enactment, they conform to and affirm an original script for queer behavior and identity. As this section has articulated, constitutive, procedural, and visual rhetorics are maintained through their performativity on and through users. Though seemingly separate conversations, these distinct approaches to rhetoric clearly

work in concert and are intertwined into the very coding of Grindr, simply existing in different rhetorical states of being.

Logging (On and Into) Grindr's Rhetorics

This chapter takes up the mobile structures of Grindr as a site of rhetoric. As explained in Chapter One, I break from previous approaches to researching Grindr by critiquing the actual rhetorical and communicative systems that constitute how a user confronts, navigates, and sees themselves and others when utilizing the application. In doing so, I advance the bubbling trend of interface criticism, bridge both interface criticism and Grindr into the rhetorical, and push research about Grindr into a more humanistic direction.

How I come to read the workflows of Grindr is exclusively situated in my own experience. As a gay man currently residing in Lincoln, Nebraska, I can only speak from my time as a Midwestern user. Though I am constantly on my phone, repeatedly updating Grindr when I visit other cities, no noticeable changes occurred in my experience of the application. This is not to shut down the possibility of other valid reads. Rather, I hope illuminating my Midwestern standpoint creates room for identification and contrast with others' experiences. Though I draw from the entirety of my time on Grindr as a resource (starting in 2011), this project focuses more heavily on observations, musings, and notes I have compiled for this project starting in March of 2014.

It not enough to simply look at digital, interactive texts like Grindr and read them statically. This is not a controversial claim, but few studies in communication have taken mobile applications seriously as dynamic, rhetorical processes. In what follows, I actively trace and document the procedural pieces of Grindr as an interactive, performative space.

This construction is but one contemporary iteration of gay space, as discussed earlier in this chapter and later in Chapter Four as a product of past technologies. But until then, it's instructive to begin working through each piece of the application as a contribution to user identity.

Grindr's structure. In this portion, I examine how data is processed and rendered on Grindr without user control. By looking at the digital structures and processes of the application, I outline the material practices of Grindr and what Grindr offers and limits to users as they traverse and play in its version of gay space.

Visual. When launching Grindr, it becomes apparent the application is an image-centric space. Profiles populate in uniform, square grids. From the very onset, the inflexible restricting of profile picture size homogenizes the outward identities of the users behind the pictures. It's visually appealing, but every picture is cropped the same. Much like Malvina Reynolds satirized in her 1962 protest song "Little Boxes," each user inhabits their own "tiny box," and "they all look just the same." Grindr sizes these images into a standardized form that becomes an easy vessel for meaning and scanning. The user profiles are interchangeable, and thus, the men of this gay space may be read as interchangeable by association. Instead of a delightfully different, queer, crazy, or heterogeneous space, the very profiles are disciplined quite literally into a bunch of squares.

This grid of a user interface mimics those of online shopping spaces as well. Each picture is presented in a standardized order. Users are allowed to write into a text box that will appear in the top right-hand corner of their profile picture, advertising their name or title. To access more information outside of the picture or title, users click into profiles to

see self-generated blurbs or listed demographic information. The process of going from the general to specific echoes the use of sites like Amazon or other online retailers where a massive search leads to an easy click into a specific purchase. It is digital window shopping—if something or someone catches your eye, you then hone in on the more exact details of what the product has to offer.

Underlying Grindr's interface is a logic of choice. As opposed to being presented with one profile at a time like on Tinder or other match-making services, profiles are generated in a manner where men who catch the user's eye are easily spotted. Grindr becomes a site where the digital and material blend in an indistinguishable way. Because mobility is built into the technology used, staying stationary does not mean the users are stale. New people may be traversing the area and will come into or out of vogue. Literally anyone could become a potential Grindr user when used in public. As such, in-person attraction and flirtation can easily be verified by checking with the digital. And if two users decide to meet, the digital inspires movements of the physical. In this way, Grindr builds a hunger, a snooping desire to inhabit gay space at all times. Anecdotally, I find myself constantly updating the application when I am in new social situations or even just sitting in my office, subsumed by the curiosity of who or what may be 0 feet away.

Grindr capitalizes on this thirsty nosiness. When users open the application, they must click out of advertisements for various products. Often times they may be standard mobile application advertisements for other applications or spammy websites. Others are more specific in constituting gay identity. Sales on jockstraps, tickets for sex cruises, Madonna "Rebel Heart" tour tickets, and HIV home test kits are common items I have encountered in advertisements. It's difficult to say if these pop ups are location specific

due to only knowing my own experience primarily in Lincoln. However, these highly sexualized advertisements implicate users as individuals confident in their sexual identity and risky sex. Users are thoughtless thots, pleasure-seeking and homonormative consumers who like options for their men, sex, and sophistication.

Touch. Grindr utilizes touch to control its interface. While this is fairly standard for almost all mobile applications, the physicality of using Grindr is still an important constitutive component to user experience. To view user profiles on Grindr's home page, the interface must be dragged from the bottom to the top of the screen. Inherently, using Grindr is a sensual experience. Fingers trace the screen, feeling its smoothness and lack of texture. This is another moment of homogeneity, with each profile feeling the exact same while being passed over. Instead of the sensual experience of touching another or even a mouse (Roth, 2014), the glassy, frictionless surface of the mobile phone becomes a performative site of consumerism and the dehumanization of other users.

Additionally, profiles on Grindr are encountered with the flick of a finger. The screen is stroked lightly up and down and tapped to enter and exit profiles. Profile after profile wizzes by with each little motion. These embodied forms of navigation replicate those of in-person interaction. In viewing each individual profile, Grindr users tap into the page, much like tapping someone on the shoulder to get their attention or create connection. The brushing motion of scrolling past profiles on the interface is like feeling the skin of another, sensuously tickling the phone with an exploring finger. A fundamental incongruity thus arises in Grindr's use: its navigation motions are personal and intuitive to interpersonal communication, but its interface positions both users and the profiles of others in passive relationships to one another.

Almost all mobile applications now use touchscreens as the primary mode of navigation. However, the combination of Grindr's content and coding structure makes touch an erotic resource within the interface. Touchscreen technology, especially in this promiscuous space of Grindr, affirms this observation. In short, touch is built into Grindr to erotically charge interaction within the application. This replicates the very bodily desires and sensations many users hope to experience at the end of a Grindr encounter. The lack of an immediate physical body inspires further desire, further use, and further lack for the user, constituting those on Grindr as erotically famished and compliant consumers.

Location. Grindr generates the profiles listed on its home screen on the basis their proximity from the user. This differs from other applications that group users by city or zip code. With each refresh of the application, Grindr profiles reorder due to the triangulation of GPS data. Using GPS data from each phone allows detailed, user-specific navigation and control of the space created by Grindr itself. Though convenient and pleasurable to use, such a protocol comes with its own problems.

Built into Grindr is a continuation of many gay communities' urban-centric bias. Cities have historically served as gay meeting spots due to the sheer number of people within them, and their constantly swirling, movement-friendly structures have lent themselves to promiscuity. However, in many ways Grindr delinks the significance of these spaces from their physicality, constructing a portal of gay space in the pocket of every user. Of course, Grindr can and is used in formal and informal, symbolic and material gay spaces, but as a site of promiscuous, gay space itself, its ties to the city need to be questioned.

Most silenced are those who live outside urban areas. Not all visibility is created equally when proximity is at play. Rural users may be able to see the full 100 profiles closest to their location, whether they are 2 miles to 200 miles away. However, those within the city may never encounter the country user—since Grindr privileges proximity in its profile generating algorithm and choice of display. In social practice, gay men already clustered together in cities can only see those closest in the network, while others in rural or more distant areas experience a one-way mirror of digital immediacy as an essentially invisible node. Rural voices and bodies are thus typically ignored and erased from users' home screens, potentially reaffirming isolation for already alienated gay people.

As hinted at in the last paragraph, this is not to say that Grindr doesn't provide more identification possibilities for rural gay users generally. Kazyak (2011) is quick to note rural queers certainly possess their own identities, and the stereotypical binary between the urban/rural is a rich resource for those in the country. It may be presumptuous to assume rural queers even care to be seen by clustered, urban users. Small town inhabitants may find locally on Grindr that there is another gay and looking guy they wouldn't have otherwise ever encountered. Thematizing the specific strategies of how people on Grindr utilize the application vernacularly is outside the scope of this project. However, present logics of urbanism are built into the very structure of Grindr and thus rhetorically, visually exclude rural individuals. Previous to Grindr, trips to gayborhoods often served as rites of passage and memorable experiences for rural individuals (myself included). However, the limitations and exclusion felt by rural individuals on Grindr are a different disciplinary moment no longer focused on obtaining

the means to travel to gay spaces. Now, it is a struggle to receive recognition after entering a queer space like Grindr in the first place. As such, Grindr risks constructing a gay space that is wider reaching yet feels smaller; a gay place that is a visual fiction but is curiously tied to physical location and urbanism. The common claim that mobile technologies are disembodied clearly erases these insights and experiences, especially of gay users, and thus must be accounted for.

Communication Flow. At its core, Grindr is a communication application. As Van De Wiele and Tong (2014) document, users wield the application for a variety of reasons. Most commonly, this motivation is to chat with other men in hopes to hook up. By no means is Grindr the first space in which gay men have been afforded the ability to flirt, cruise, and have sex with other men. However, the communicative processes by which this attraction and courting has occurred is structured specifically by the code developed in Grindr's creation.

Grindr pushes individuals into one-on-one, dyadic communicative interactions. When accessing the chat screen, messages can only be sent to one individual per thread. Conversations are sustained through private interaction, away from the public view of the home screen. Even getting to the chat screen to send a message requires users to travel down the wormhole of a single user's profile. Multiple profiles cannot be messaged at one time, requiring users to very specifically click into a person's profile to send a message. They are faced with an expanded version of that user's profile picture, their specific profile text, stats, and distance before a message can be sent.

This shuts down potential uses of Grindr for collective action and conversation while simultaneously reaffirming contemporary gay rights rhetorics. Instead of allowing

robust deliberations about the future of queer organizing (perhaps idealistic) or the planning of a night out on the town, all conversation is relegated to dyadic interactions, framing all queer relations as being between two people. This choice to limit the number of parties allowed in chat closely mimics moves made for same-sex marriage. Often, good queers are those who are in long-term, committed relationships that are consummated in marriages. Like heteronormative, different-sex relationships, first connections between strangers are imbued with romantic (not just sexual) potential, becoming the spark to a progress narrative of flirtation, exclusivity, proposal, and marriage. The radical sexual politics of gay liberation are stifled in this set up. Polyamorous, open, and non-dyadic relationships are closed off from pursuit.

This isn't to say couples do not try. Dyads and other groupings subvert the constitutive system by sharing a profile together, jointly messaging potential partners and advertising themselves as a unit. These two identities (or more) are synthesized into one relational unit, an entity with which they attempt to find sexual partners. Joint profiles break down the logics of categorization used by Grindr to sort through users. Unless a couple possesses an eerie amount of homogeneity, it becomes difficult for a set of users to designate their shared height, weight, race, tribe, or any other identity marker as a pair. Which partner's information deserves to be listed? If no information is provided, these coupled profiles may be erased from the social and material landscape of Grindr due to the filtering discussed in the next section. However, if some information is provided and matches a user's preferences, the blurring of these multiple bodies and characteristics exceeds the disciplining function of Grindr. Thus, queers may take advantage of a fissure in the application's constitutive processes, forcing other users to at least acknowledge

that couples, throuples, interracial individuals, or skinny-fat pairings are both visible and viable.

Despite this potential, couples on Grindr are still affirming a privileging of committed relations. Those with joint profiles have established themselves as relationally close, intimate and stable enough to occupy the same space and digital embodiment of a profile. Spontaneously or promiscuously fostered associations (like an impromptu orgy) are more difficult to create. Generally, advertisements for group play or gloryholes may be geographically situated, but the individualized GPS and the textual space provided by Grindr make it difficult to obtain adequate direction and immanence for such adventurous and roving relations. However, the potentiality does exist, if unwitnessed in my experience on the application in Nebraska.

Grindr is a place that dictates the situating of bodies and the construction of social relations. By working from a logic of singular users thirsty to communicate in dyads, Grindr affirms recent channeling by gay rights advocates to steer queer libido into state-recognized unions. Promiscuity easily flows through the afforded channels of Grindr with so much sexual potential. However, how Grindr directs that desire closes off non-homonormative relations.

User curated content. Procedures and processes are not always closed systems. Grindr also provides more active means of participation for its users to constitute their identities. I have separated this portion of analysis from the above due to the engagement and control Grindr expects from users wielding these aspects of the application. Though I'm not willing to say users have an abundance of radical agency within Grindr, it's difficult to deny that at the very least the right to choose (however problematic its logics

may be) is an idea built into aspects of the application itself. These selections take place through a handful of features within the application that can generally be thought of as user curation tools: filters, blocks, and tribe identification.

Filters. Previously, I described the constitutive functions of location and the displaying of profiles. While users cannot alter the algorithm used to order and display other people on Grindr, they do possess the ability to filter out members on the basis of many identity characteristics. Such features are incredibly common on dating sites, but their use in gay, enclave spaces is troublesome.

To understand the importance of the filters provided on Grindr, a small explanation of Grindr's profit structure and its relationship to new users is warranted. I specify new users because as an application, Grindr offers free and subscription services within the same downloaded application. "Grindr Xtra" is the premium, paid version of the application new users become familiar with as they navigate Grindr. However, 72 hours after enrolling a new account on Grindr, users are downgraded to a limited functionality. The tools no longer available for use are still visible to the user and accidentally clicking them spurs a pop-up advertisement to upgrade to Grindr Xtra.

What is easy to forget while fetishizing and celebrating mobile applications is their money-making function. Grindr is not open-source; it is not a non-for-profit gay organizing tool. It is a capitalistic venture with the goal to make money through advertising revenue and Grindr Xtra subscriptions. As such, Grindr must keep its users' attention to sell advertising space while simultaneously creating a user experience that is lacking enough to warrant a purchase of Grindr Xtra.

The filtering options of Grindr illuminate this tension. Nine filters are made available to users that will display or hide Grindr profiles on the basis of the following categories: use of display photo, age, height, weight, body type, ethnicity, relationship status, what type of interaction one is “looking for” (dates, chats, friends, sex, etc.), and tribe (subcultures within gay communities like twinks, bears, and otters, oh my). Available to free users are the tribes, age, and “looking for” filters, a third of the paid options.

Complicating and inspiring the deployment of filters is the restricted amount of profiles one can see when a free member. Grindr limits the number of user profiles you can view in accordance to your paid status. This differs from previous gay dating applications and websites due to the circumference of the potential connections. Instead of users being organized on the basis of city or neighborhood, they are populated in order of proximal closeness to the viewing user. In place of creating a static, city-wide snapshot of local queers, Grindr sustains a constant flow of profiles and waiting connections that rush toward the user on the interface, continuously updating with every refresh of the application. However stimulating this may be, a finite number of profiles are shown. When users first create an account with Grindr, the application displays the 300 closest users. Free users, though, are only shown 100 profiles. While this seems like a substantial number, in use, it feels like an abrupt stopping point. A pleasurable ease is formed as you scroll, scroll, scroll up the screen. Shirtless torsos, smiling charmers, and blank profiles whiz by until you reach a black text box that reads, “Maximum Guys Loaded/You’ve Reached Your Limit. Upgrade to Load More Guys!”

Filters are provided to hone in on men who would more likely be of interest to the user. Filtration becomes a tool, a way to tippy-toe past this cut off point by narrowing down outliers and individuals with whom you would not want to speak. Realistically, age ranges become an easy starting point for this editing process, shaping the maturity of Grindr between a range of 18 to 99 years old. Swaths of people disappear as the filter is used, reshuffling the pool of men flowing up the screen.

Grindr affords an accentuated, heightened flavor of discrimination, literally asking users to privilege profiles with identity characteristics they like and over profiles they do not. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, gay communities and spaces have a long and disappointing history of flourishing in –isms: racism, sexism, ageism, ableism. The list goes on. It is not difficult to dismiss these filters as extensions of humans exerting sexual agency. Yes, all individuals possess some form of preference, but there is something textually quite different happening within this configuration of gay space. When someone goes to a gay bar or pride event, they are confronted with those who are there. They potentially see people of all ages, races, and backgrounds, radically occupying space in whatever state they feel comfortable. Those present have no choice but to acknowledge the co-presence of all in attendance. This does not mean they're going to talk, dance, interact, or even make eye contact. However, the potentiality is there, and an acknowledgement of difference occupying the same space can be a productive form of identification. Grindr encourages users to hide these potential moments of recognition through its systems of filtration.

Blocking. Furthermore, Grindr allows users to block each other on the application. When one individual chooses to block another, they are mutually invisible

upon each other's interface. This function is helpful for users experiencing harassment or abuse. However, it can also "correct" for those who exceed the limitations of the filtering system. One by one, individual users and future contact can be removed from the experience of the application, manicuring a person's social surroundings within gay space to be as aesthetically pleasing or homogenizing as desired. Though functioning much on the same logics as filtering, it is important to point out the potential uses for blocking in combination with or in lieu of the filtering on Grindr as a hyper-individualized customization tool.

Tribes. An area of strategic essentialism and potential exists in the Tribes filter and function on Grindr. The following labels are available for users to list on their profiles: bear, clean-cut, daddy, discreet, geek, jock, leather, otter, poz, rugged, trans, twink, and unspecified. Though I have never heard these categories described as tribes before using Grindr, there is a certain accuracy to the idea. To find this nugget of generative potential, though, I feel it necessary to address the problematic baggage carried by the word "tribes." Tribes, as a categorization tool in this U.S. context, can introduce Othering, colonialist language into an already problematic gay space. Tribes, constitutively, are essentialist literally down to their blood. Individuals are born into and made intelligible to their tribal communities through family lineages and performances, while also maintaining their culture through repeated practices. Are men who identify as "students" or "geeks" born into this category? I hesitate to agree. Thus, tribes as an organizing word limits the fluidity of identity the term attempts to make visible from the onset.

Additionally, tribes conjure a problematic, Western imaginary. Tribes are not groups of community members who share a polite political and social cohesion. They are internally different, non-Western, and most importantly associated with war in many contexts. The word “tribes” is reappropriated in an already hostile space, allowing an infusion of unchanging, masculine, violent imagery when gay spaces are already whitewashed, neoliberal, and less tolerant than gay rights rhetoric would have us believe. Obviously, not all (if any) tribes possess these problematic, stereotypical behaviors, but labeling this function with colonialist language speaks to a lack of thought in Grindr’s creation.

With this being said, tribes do give qualitative description and texture to the lives, practices, and personalities of Grindr users. Obviously, they are not a substitute for getting to know someone on an individual level, but within a space that is so strictly divided and filtered on the basis of discrete categories and numbers, tribes can be ambiguous enough qualifiers and signifiers to allow flexibility and qualitative identification to occur.

More overtly, tribes can simultaneously provide in/visibility for marginalized identities on Grindr and gay communities at large. Bears, or masculine-displaying men who are often hairy and heavy-set, work to push back against the rampant fat-shaming among gays, as exemplified by the numerous body-focused tribes like jock, otter, and twink. Poz labeled individuals can also be identified outright, like a digital HIV tattoo (Brouwer, 1998), where in poz individuals can see individuals with their shared serostatus and force others to confront their own HIV status (or lack thereof). Trans* (and queer) individuals, whether masculine, feminine, FTM, MTF, or anything in between, are

able to trouble the often strict masculine bias and femmephobia of Grindr. This outreach is somewhat limited, though. For example, in the course of this project, I only saw one user within (what I can assume to be) the Lincoln and Omaha areas (give or take 50 miles from my home or campus) use the label poz or trans*. Though I can only speak from my Nebraskan experience, generative potentials may await larger cities with more individuals or cultures that accept these labeling practices.

Individualized Queer World Clicking?

The fragmentation, essentialization, erasure, and individualization of gay space created by Grindr marks a contemporary shift in how we understand the relationship between ourselves and our communities. I address these issues in this chapter not as a cherishing of a universal gayness or an ignorantly positive “we.” Rather, by investigating both the unchangeable structures of Grindr and user-curated content, I have extended the conversation about Grindr’s place in queer communities by questioning what this constellation of gay space does, what it “selects, deflects, and reflects” about ourselves and our politic.

Grindr, as one potential iteration of gay space, affords us a palatable turn from more clunky, collective interfaces. In some ways, all material spaces can instantly become a little gayer based on who is logged in and visible on Grindr. Traditionally heteronormative spaces are transformed and shifted toward the queer. However, the experience of gay spaces on Grindr deemphasizes the co-constitutive nature of collective action. Rather, the circumference of gayness is circumscribed in the likeness of a pocket, of a screen, of a filter. Users of Grindr are literally positioned into the center of the gay community with all other bodies ordered outward from the starting point of the interface,

a stark break from the previously shared experiences of bar, parades, and other articulations of gay space. Such a personalized visual and material relationship with gay space unapologetically and unfortunately affirms neoliberal logics of individualization and choice, echoing the recent subsumption of gay liberation rhetorics into the homonormative ideology of rights. Put metaphorically, gayness on Grindr is poured into an ice cube tray of 3x3 square blocks, organized by a shopper's preference and positioned in unprecedented ways that obscure the collective agency of a localized queer multitude.

By individualizing the experience of gay space, Grindr troubles the imagined and material relationships of its users with gay communities and identities. One's identity as gay has a markedly different feeling when it is a normalized, individualized occurrence. Such inherent and singular discourses of gay identification echo that of "born this way" rhetorics, viewing gayness as less of a movement, politic, and identity and more as an uncontrollable, biological reality. Like the machine that renders Grindr on a screen, users are largely reduced to atomized, static terms and movements. Grindr may be the first or only place where gay individuals come into contact with other queers, and if those interactions are for personalized, homonormative purposes, the application's ability to sustain healthy and vibrant humans and communities is suspect at best.

Though I would like to hold up Grindr as a demonstration of the power of counterpublics, I simply cannot. If we are to understand counterpublics as places "formed by their conflict with the norms and contexts of their cultural environment, and [that] this context of domination inevitably entails distortion" (Warner, 2002, p. 63), then indeed a productive queering and stretching of heteronormative space is occurring on Grindr. However, Grindr's procedures constitute passive users and an experience of community

in name only. Asen (2000) observes that ideally counterpublics are “explicitly articulated alternatives to wider publics that exclude the interests of potential participants” (p. 424). Besides the ability to see 100 other gay men in your proximity, few rhetorical resources are available to users in this “counterpublic.” Grindr could create a queer space for gay people to come together and experiment, flourish, debate, and move with each other. However, in its current iteration as explored in this chapter, Grindr atomizes and individualizes the experience of inhabiting gay spaces while drastically lowering the vulnerability threshold of “participation.” Grindr and similar applications’ “queer world making” (Berlant & Warner, 1998, p. 558) comes with a cost—a sense of liberation that can only be celebrated if you ignore immanence entirely.

While I have thus far teased out many problematic aspects of Grindr, I recuperate and explore the mobility function of the application in my next chapter. Grindr’s increased individual mobility is queerly promiscuous, and in such radical sexual movement, I find a productive (scholarly) politic.

Chapter 3: The Passing Potential for Promiscuity and Mobility Through Grindr

“What is straight? A line can be straight, or a street, but the human heart, oh, no, it's curved like a road through mountains.”

– Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*

“Gay liberation did not create gay promiscuity. There was sex before there were marches, politics, or books – it was the best reason for being homosexual, it and love.”

– Christopher Bram, *Eminent Outlaws: The Gay Writers Who Changed America*

Queers have always been on the move, if not publicly then privately. In many ways, such mobility has been a main anxiety in U.S. homophobic culture. With sexual deviance comes social deviance. How can we trust the gays when they could be anywhere doing anything at any time with anyone? What about our community standards? What about the children?

Though I'm being sarcastic, many anti-gay laws and rhetorics address this queer potential. Contemporarily, they have only changed their location and now bubble up from debates over gay marriage and citizenship (Morris & Sloop, 2006). Chávez (2013) celebrates the agency built through mobile coalitions working against these homophobic (and colonialist) fears, describing queer migration activists as always upon the horizon of potential. As I follow the metaphor, this horizon is a spatial immanence that blurs separate entities while allowing the room for something new to appear and, as I would add, the potentiality of motion.

Keeping this historical motion in mind, it is curious the act of marriage is the site of contestation for gay rights organizing. As Von Burg (2014) notes, citizenship can be a demobilizing identity created by a state to track and slow the movement of its peoples within a border. This is a disciplinary move by states to celebrate and privilege the rights of a homogenous citizenship, a move also echoed positively throughout the study of rhetoric in a way Chávez (2015) laments. Much in the same manner, awarding the

citizenship rights of marriage to same sex couples is a plea for less mobile, less promiscuous behavior in queer communities. The difference is that now calls for monogamous, married lifestyles are coming from within queer communities themselves.

Grindr antagonizes this tension surrounding queerness and mobility. It does more than confront this strenuous relationship; it exasperates the fissures. As discussed in the previous chapter, Grindr changes users' relationship to gay space. Accessible from anywhere, queerness is no longer housed in the material spaces of gayborhoods or bars. Grindr expands gay space as an always in-motion phenomenon that exceeds the material limits of areas traditionally considered heteronormative through the act of passing. Users not only pass as straight, though; they also pass within Grindr by withholding personal information. As a mobile application and site of mobility, Grindr affords more promiscuous (sexual) action between its users and their surroundings than has been experienced in recent history, much like the Bram quotation implies.

Not only have queers always been mobile; they have almost always been passing. Both the human heart and its queer users (including Tennessee Williams) have navigated homophobic terrain. Queers often benefit from and work within a constellation of material and social relationships that allow them to pass, to be seen and treated as a heterosexual or member of a dominant group. Passing has become a game and a way of life. Metaphors like "the closet" offer spatial and communal legitimacy to the asexual or heterosexual performances so many queers live. "Coming out" stories and anniversaries like my own in Chapter One mark turning points and sites of connection in the lives of many queer individuals, ruptures from the day-to-day of passing. Even this language of "coming out" involves directional movement "outward," liberation from the sedentary

frameworks of compulsory heterosexuality. Without even being sexually active, queer youth have historically dodged, hid, and passed as a mode of survival until they felt enough agency to go public with their privates.

This chapter explores how Grindr invites the language of queer spaces and identities into the realm of mobility. To accomplish as much, I briefly consider the mobilities literature and how it has approached queer mobilities specifically. I then pivot, arguing Grindr's affordance of passing is a queer mobility that challenges both the mobilities paradigm and the passing literature to account for the systemic and invisible motion of the application and its users. Grindr's passing is best understood as a promiscuous action, where promiscuity is reclaimed as a productive political and theoretical concept. When we as scholars pay attention to the promiscuous, we are sensitized to five overlapping areas of mobility worthy of greater attention: vulnerability, eroticism, queerness, morals, and messiness. To show these lenses in action, I conclude by returning to Grindr and analyzing autoethnographic vignettes of my own experience as a Grindr user, documenting the richness lost when mobility is taken as the overriding paradigm.

Mobilities

However, to even begin the work of considering promiscuity as productive, a review of the mobilities literature is warranted. It almost seems fitting that the terms mobility and mobilities have such fleeting, ephemeral definitions. In their inaugural editorial, christening the journal *Mobilities*, Hannam, Sheller, and Urry (2006) map the current state of the mobilities turn and future lines of research. Mobility, in their assessment, "encompasses both the large-scale movements of people, objects, capital and

information across the world, as well as the more local processes of daily transportation, movement through public space and the travel of material things within everyday life” (p. 1). In addition to their definition, examples may be useful. Hannam, Sheller, and Urry foresee mobilities moving into four different realms: migration and tourism, informational mobilities, spatial mobilities, and material mobilities. Five years later, Urry (2011) echoed and refined these places for growth, typologizing five interconnected but usefully separate mobilities to explore: corporeal travel, the physical movement of objects, imaginative travel through media, virtual travel, and communicative travel (p. 5-6).

Communicatively, the mobilities paradigm has also proven itself to be a useful vocabulary for scholars. Von Burg (2014), in the previously cited review of contemporary manuscripts that take up mobility and immigration, positions mobility as the “new blue”: “just like the sky and the sea, mobility surrounds us” (p. 242). She elaborates: “The act of moving, the concept of transportation, and the ability to change our social, political, or geographical position are not new, but mobility is often taken for granted, invisible as an object of rhetorical study” (p. 242). Others in communication studies have focused more on travel and media as a metaphor, as well as mobile infrastructures like taxicabs and truckers’ CB radios (Sharma, 2008; Packer, 2008). The fleeting and inventive nature of this mobility is not necessarily conducive to study from a distance. Such interests in mobilities have pushed communication scholars and rhetoricians out of the office and into the sites of action allowing themselves to not only witness but to become movement itself (McHendry, Middleton, Endres, Senda-Cook, & O’Byrne, 2014).

While this project appears to fit within these two previous trends, a richer sense of the relationship between queerness and mobility is necessary. This project joins the voices of others who have taken up gay mobilities in a myriad of forms. Benedicto (2009) and Collins (2009) have both brought an international, global voice to the conversation, focusing their studies on gayness in Manila. Benedicto maps local gay men's classist disgust with the congestion and growth of Manila (and the high number of Filipino foreign workers circulating through wealthy spaces), and Collins critiques the masculine, colonialist expectations of expatriates and sex tourists in the city. Both studies outline how consumption and mobility are engrained in many homonormative conceptualizations of gay identity. In a U.S. context, Gilley (2012) recalls his time as an ethnographic census worker, tasked with documenting the movements of "highly mobile peoples" (p. 150), focusing specifically on a group of GBQT2 (gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and two-spirited) men from Oklahoma. Due to seasonally-aligned social, sexual, and cultural patterns of travel, Gilley highlights how the U.S. census excludes GBQT2 native men from formal practices of U.S. citizenship and law due to the unintelligibility of their queer and indigenous mobility in a sedentary-based system.

Taking into account these studies of queer mobility, including those of Crooks (2013) and Bastille (2013) from Chapter One, it is clear queerness, identities, technology, and space are all important aspects to the work of the mobilities paradigm. Such a move entails costs, though. For instance, cities are important hot beds of mobility and mobilities studies, viewed as central nodes of circulation between bodies, communication, and transportation infrastructures. Though it is true cities are vastly mobile spaces, who is left out when this environment is privileged? As documented in

Chapter Two, one population erased in urban-centric ideas of mobility is rural individuals. Depending on the social conditions within their rural towns, gay men in country areas may be forced or, as Kazyak (2011) complicates, may choose to pass as heteronormative in their day-to-day interactions and channel their same-sex desires through Grindr in private since not all bodies can afford to be in the minority and visible.

While the dichotomy between mobility and promiscuity I explore may be problematized (through applications like Grindr), it is useful to consider the differences that arise from each term's use. In many of the works discussed above and their defining touchstones, mobility is an action-centered phenomenon. Moments of mobility are traced as they occur in cities or public spaces like bars or roads, documenting the flows of populations. Promiscuity, though, can take an even more grounded, context-driven, and fluid approach. Promiscuous behavior may happen in public or in private, like in cruising parks, public bathrooms, and steam rooms. Anonymity may be maintained by the promiscuous, but vulnerability and safety are also present and questioned. Mobility leans mechanistic in texture; promiscuity pushes play. Within Grindr, both of these threads exist within its individualizing framework. Grindr users may be limited in their communication patterns and sense of gay space, but they can also tap into a promiscuous potential that certainly exceeds to limitations of the application's interface.

The visibility bias of both gay rights and the mobilities paradigm can be challenged to better account for identities and bodies not accepted publicly. One way both queerness and mobility are articulated through Grindr is passing, which blurs strict lines between the public and private, heterosexual and homosexual, and the chaste and the promiscuous. I define passing as a rhetorical phenomenon where an individual is

assumed to be or is treated as a member of a social group due to the interplay of that person's surroundings and behaviors. For example, imagine a parent has ordered their child a kid's meal at a fast food restaurant. Due to the sexist, gendered culture of the U.S., as well as the long hair of the child, the worker packs a pink doll toy with the meal. This cis-male child never actively or purposefully participated in the social scenario as an attempt to pass as a girl, but the patriarchal social and material relationships within the scene created a constellation of passing.

Since none of us are inherently of one group or another, indeed we are always performing and thus always passing (even if this affirms our identities). In expanding the scene of passing to include one's surroundings and not just one singular, strategic moment of rhetorical action by a passer, I extend the circumference of the current passing scholarship beyond the individual rhetor. To better appreciate the shift in focus within my definition (and to better understand Grindr's theoretical and mobile work in passing), I discuss contemporary, communicative theories of passing below.

Passing

Dawkins's (2012) *Clearly Invisible* is imaginative and concise in its description of passing. Focusing on racial passing throughout history, she pieces together a rhetorical description of passing as a practice. According to Dawkins, passers, dupes, and in-group clairvoyants all work together to create moments of passing. Essentially, passers are individuals who present membership within a group though they don't necessarily internally hold such an identification. Dupes are those within the dominant in-group who believe the passer's presentation. In-group clairvoyants, though, hold the knowledge of the passer's "real identity" and recognize the passer's attempt as a textual wink (Morris,

2002) without unveiling the truth. These three work in tandem to maintain the status quo of a situation even though an ambiguous queering is occurring underneath the surface of the interaction.

One well-documented example of this style of passing by gay men has been written about by Bennett (2009). Due to the AIDS epidemic and the subsequent (though extremely minor) contamination of the blood supply, gay men are still banned in 2015 from giving blood by organizations like the Red Cross. Bennett documents the rhetorical action of gay men who donate blood anyway and “pass” as straight to affirm their civic identity as “good citizens.” These passers stand in contrast with those whom protest directly to nurses and staff members at blood donation sites, enacting a more subtle politic. By infiltrating the system and donating blood, these passing gay men stand as living examples of the cleanliness of gay blood, reconstituting gayness as congruent with health and community.

While racial passing and subversive blood donation are both interesting and historically situated rhetorical moments, an alternative read of their passing is possible. Rhetorical affordances provided by U.S. racist culture and the homophobic questioning by the Red Cross also play a role in making passing intelligible from the start, providing the material necessary to allow a “passing” read. As a digital extension of this take on Dawkins and Bennett’s accounts of passing, I posit that Grindr serves as the material and space for passing too. While the constitutive rhetoric of place has been examined in more physical, material forms (Endres & Senda-Cook, 2012), this project argues digital places possess materiality and offer the constitution of identities, of a people (McGee, 1975). In

addition to users being constructed as the center of gay space (Chapter Two), another identity afforded by the application both on and off Grindr is that of a passer.

This phenomenon both hides and highlights Grindr users in new ways. Instead of adopting the identity category of “gay” by attending to the previously described traditional gay spaces, men who have sex with men are able to experience intimacy and pleasure by eschewing identity politics. Reducing this identity down to men who have sex with men, these Grindr users are actually being quite honest and forthcoming about their position—labeling themselves as interested in sex but lacking a commitment to the visibility politics and sediment of adopting homonormative gay identity. It’d be a mistake to assume that anonymous users are indeed unmarked (Crawford, 2002), but this mobile congealment of identity as not homo, hetero, or bisexual is made possible by the structure of Grindr as an application.

Highlighting such fluidity on Grindr emphasizes how passing has always been an inherently mobile act in a variety of ways. Passing is an active word and behavior as captured in its naming, indicating a movement from one point or identity to another. When one is passing, they are already mobile. However, in the vernacular use of the word, it is apparent those viewing an act of passing must either be static or slow. When an individual successfully passes, viewers won’t know otherwise. The relationship between the bodies and materials of the space move in synch. Thus, passing is only documented and made intelligible through the analysis of its citations and materials left behind in the act or when it doesn’t go as planned. In the broad view then, we must recognize that we are always passing, that any moment has the eminent potential to be an act of passing, an act of mobility.

If passing is a mobility, then why hasn't it been explored through the mobilities paradigm? I argue it is simply due to a lack of language to account for the messy movements of queers, since many queer spaces and mobilities have historically remained private or have inconspicuously passed due to the disciplinary danger of living "out" in a homophobic culture. I believe embracing promiscuity as a queer mobility may better illuminate actions like passing. In order to situate this claim, I explore how promiscuity has been deployed in the vernacular, queer theory, and communication studies below.

Affirming Promiscuity

The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* defines promiscuity as "indiscriminate order" and "confusion," in addition to other definitions like "the frequent, casual changing of sexual partners" and "the ability of a protein, organism, etc., to interact with a variety of targets or in a non-specific manner." *Merriam-Webster Online* follows closely with the "miscellaneous mingling or selection of persons or things" and promiscuity as "sexual behavior." Such a messy definition also possesses a messy etymology, originating from the classical Latin *prōmiscuus* for shared, mixed, or common which was later infused with the French *promiscuité* as a confused and indiscriminate mix of people or things, according to the previously cited *OED* entry. From its most basic denotation, promiscuity has been a term with blurring, confusing movements that possess the potential to affect others. These definitions are also tinged with moral, evaluative language, concerning itself with sexual partners and the "mingling" of persons or things. As exemplified later in this essay, promiscuity is poised to sharpen a critic's attention to these indiscriminant moments of miscellaneous mingling

(between men), in addition to the vulnerabilities, desires, and moral aspects that shape such movements.

The AIDS crisis renewed queer communities' interest in the term "promiscuity." Google Ngram confirms this trend widely, marking a dip in books deploying the word promiscuity from 1976 to 1982 that consistently and upwardly climbed to the peak of the term's usage in 1996. As Crimp (1987) notes in his foundational essay "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic," promiscuity was associated with gay lifestyles and those with AIDS from the onset of the crisis. However, this did not stop promiscuous behavior. Calls from within the gay community, like Kramer's polemical writings, offered marriage as a cure to promiscuity and AIDS (Rand, 2008). No sustainable treatment or preventive measure was easily or quickly provided by scientific and governmental sources, though, due to the complex nature of the disease for the former and the blatant homophobia of the latter. Such uncertainty and unrealistic pushes for abstinence both from within and outside the gay community were futile, and Crimp argues it was promiscuity itself that curbed the impact of AIDS, since gay individuals, through experimentation and by being uninhibited by heteronormativity to freely explore a multiplicity of pleasures outside of procreative intercourse, invented "safe sex." He argues:

Gay male promiscuity should be seen instead [of harmful] as a positive model of how sexual pleasures might be pursued by and granted to everyone if those pleasures were not confined within the narrow limits of institutionalized sexuality. Indeed, it is the lack of promiscuity and its lessons that suggests that many straight people will have a much harder time learning "how to have sex in an epidemic" than we did. (p. 253)

I pick up (digitally) where Crimp's affirmation of promiscuity has faded. The numerous virus and epidemic-related words used in digital spaces harkens to a vernacular connection between AIDS theorizing and networked rhetorics. Payne (2014) agrees, writing, "A history of digital media's entry into the everyday lives of individuals must include a focus on intimacy" (p. 1). In an earlier essay, Payne (2013) notes how social media structures have encouraged the act of "sharing" while erasing the risk and responsibilities typically associated with logics of virality. As a discreet application, Grindr manages to hide its ideological moves and the limits placed on the seemingly frictionless subjectivities it creates. Of course, "any understanding of risk at the level of social media users is complicated, then, by recognition of the ways in which their subjectivity is compromised by interface design that undercuts agency while promising and rewarding autonomy and interactivity" (Payne, 2014, p. 95). Though Payne is describing the enigmatic moves of Facebook's Social Graph feature, these same mystifying, frictionless structures exist on Grindr and were teased out in Chapter Two. In this constitution, applications like Grindr hide and constrain users within (neoliberally) prescribed logics, both liberating and limiting users by offering a broader experience of queer promiscuity while being simultaneously restricted, atomized, and individualized by the algorithms comprising the technology's very structure.

Indeed, digital interfaces are also promiscuous because they leave a rhetorical residue on their users (Payne, 2014). However, I harken back to Crimp's original reclaiming of promiscuity as generative. While Payne is by all accounts correct regarding the metaphoric shifts brought about when "sharing" is a dominant logic built into interfaces, I believe these frictionless spaces are not closed systems. Promiscuity has the

potential to exceed the limitations of its container and its users' social position due to its active and overwhelming mobility.

Brought into the digital, promiscuity's original definition of "indiscriminate order" and "confusion" can even be applied to the digital (Jackson, 2007), fostering movement and connection in a highly structured, impeccably ordered (gay) space like Grindr. Taken outside its structures, Grindr creates a rupture for a return to previous mobilities of promiscuity. Promiscuity taught gay men to how to "have sex in an epidemic," and promiscuous digital behavior may be pedagogically fruitful to create grounded knowledge about how to break from technology's seemingly impenetrable, algorithmic structures. Abstinence from locative media will not develop a realistic cure or a set of safe practices for users. Grappling, probing, and examining these devices (and as this chapter examines, the language used to describe their movement) is necessary and far more generative.

Placing promiscuity at center of this analysis reworks the homonormative and sedentary discourses outlined at the beginning of this chapter from the inside out. Similarly, promiscuity as a mobile term can restructure how we approach the mobilities paradigm and its focus on the visible. Promiscuity, despite its negative connotations, combines the queer and mobile easily. Mobilities, when used instead of promiscuity, risks erasing queer experience and knowledges by pushing scholars to don "academic drag" and potentially miss the very queerness of a situation (Samek & Donofrio, 2013). Using the term as a lens from which to view movement, I argue critics are better sensitized to five aspects of motion when they weigh promiscuity over mobility:

vulnerability, eroticism, queerness, morals, and messiness. I example and discuss each of these below.

Five Potentials of Promiscuity

Vulnerability. As an organizing term, promiscuity accounts for feelings of vulnerability that come with some mobile or non-static behaviors. Though many scholars mention individuals being affected by mobility or affecting others in movement, promiscuity forefronts the potential feelings and consequences of this type of behavior. Promiscuity acknowledges both risk and a risk society's tendency to force those in lower social position to enact incredibly dicey behaviors to become socially or politically mobile.

Vulnerability can possess a variety of textures, a both/and of positivity and negativity. They may be affective, social, biological, political, historical, or a variety of unimagined or unarticulated statuses. In participating promiscuously, an agent is confronted with a certain potentiality for ramifications, regardless of whether or not they are immediately observable or known.

Grindr, as a site for vulnerability, demonstrates the appropriateness of promiscuity over mobility in the following story from my experiences:

Scene One: I didn't recognize him at first. I lazily checked Grindr while lounging in bed on my day away from campus, and I noticed him. 26 feet away. 26 feet? You have to be kidding me.

I've been studying, questioning, analyzing, lurking Grindr for literally years, and now I have a gaybor? What's his name? What's he about? I scanned his profile to see that he's in essence a nice guy around my age. Attractive. That evening, my partner's reaction wasn't as stellar when I showed him our new neighbor's profile.

"26 feet away? Chase. That's just creepy."

It used to be easy to brush this off. Once, I thought I saw him jump into his car as we were parking. Another time, someone with the same style of haircut slipped into the doorway and scurried up the stairs as we approached the entrance

of our building. So many close calls. I can see it now. I can picture myself down in the mailroom, and he shows up, key in hand. I obviously wouldn't know what to say to him and would probably grab my mail in silence, leaving behind a trail of social anxiety and general dumbfoundedness.

He's even messaged me. "What's up," he says to my two profiles, one with and one without a face picture. Maybe he knows it's me? I can't really tell based off of his messages. I know I've resigned myself to not sending a reply, but I do think about responding sometimes. What if he finds me unbearable? Or if he gets attracted to me? Presumptuous, I know.

The only thing that has bothered me is his latest profile picture change. There he is, mirror selfie and all, in our bathroom. I mean, of course, it isn't our exact bathroom, but living in the same complex, it is visually. He's leaning against the same cherry cabinets and pale tiles as those in my bathroom. It's like he's living with me, just in another room some 26 feet away.

While aspects of and potentials for stranger sociability, like me meeting my gaybor in Scene One, can emerge through the terms mobility and promiscuity, the procedural passing of Grindr is better exemplified in promiscuity. Grindr is mobile, but it serves more as a site of promiscuity, where "private intimacy and public strangerhood is transformed into the possibility of intimate relations among strangers" (Deem, 2002, p. 452). There is an intimacy and danger hanging in the air with Grindr, even if the application itself attempts to minimize these feelings.

The risks and vulnerabilities are numerous: Though my profile is blank and "anonymous," will I be harmed in my own home? How awkward will interacting with another person be? Is my partner jealous? Why am I finding the prospect of meeting horrifying and exciting? By no means is my mindset here to hook up with this neighbor. However, my very presence on Grindr infuses my relationships with other users in close proximity (like my neighbor) with an uninvited sexual potential. The circumference of comfort we typically ascribe to the private has been exceeded. Mobility and publicity are exciting and sometimes radical, but what happens when it infiltrates your private so

starkly? These are the types of questions organizing under promiscuity is best suited for, as mobility hides the agent within the motion of the act.

Eroticism. There is a stark and utter lack of libido in mobility as an organizing term. It feels cold, technical, and much too mechanistic. When put into conversation with promiscuity, though, it is clear promiscuity's baggage of sexual intimacy sings. This is not to say mobility is not an appropriate word at times; however, much interaction and movement is in the pursuit of intimacy. As Peters (1993) writes in *Speaking Into The Air*, "The intellectual history of 'communication' is a record of the erotic complications of modern life" (p. 180), and Grindr attempts to promiscuously move us closer to human touch. Our language within communication and mobility studies should do the same. To forego further complications, promiscuity motions scholars toward the erotics of mobility as manifested in a variety of ways, like the following:

Scene Two: With a jerk of the wheel, Mom pulls into the parking lot of what may be the tiniest Panera I have ever seen. I had been enjoying our vacation to Kansas City, Missouri, and having a fresh feed of men on Grindr didn't hurt either. Kansas City was easily the biggest city I had visited since joining Grindr.

After I unbuckled my seatbelt, I walked into the store with my family. It was morning, so a French toast bagel was certainly going to happen. I refreshed Grindr as I impatiently and semi-awkwardly stood in line. I instinctively clicked the closest profile to me and expanded his picture.

"How may I help you today?" the cute employee in front of me asked. Before I could order, I looked up from my phone and put two-and-two together. It's him. This exquisitely nice gentleman in front of me is on Grindr. He's literally 0 feet away.

I ordered my bagel and made my way to a seat, absolutely reeling. It's not that I have a bad relationship with my family or that I'm not open with them about my sexuality. But this? Perhaps by coincidence (or perhaps not!), he began wiping down tables as we finished up our meal. We made eye contact for a second, maybe even two, and I left the store smiling.

"What?" my mom asked.

"Nothing."

Scene Three: It's been the entirety of Winter Break '14 since I checked my tablet's Grindr account (blank profile except age), and I missed a good amount of

messages. Seven in fact. Two are from the same profile with a picture of an orangey sunset I've seen multiple times when I check Grindr in my office.

"Sup?" one asks. Okay. Pretty typical.

I read the next message from a few days later: "I see you're near Oldfather [Hall]. Wanna play in my office?"

Excuse me? Oldfather Hall is where my office is located, and I've seen this profile around. He is typically a few hundred feet away, and since I'm on the fourth floor, I assume it must be someone above or below me by a bit. In no way, shape, or form do I have listed that I'm looking to hook up. Other than my age, I do not have much of anything on my profile. I'm honestly baffled, if not a little flattered. I close the message and move to the next.

Plenty of erotic rhetorical material is circulating throughout these scenes. In Scene Two, the unexpected eroticism of the digital meeting the material exceeds the decorum of a customer service interaction. Additionally, a typically professional and work-related structure was radically infused and inscribed with desire in Scene Three, where each office door in the building now holds the specter of an invitation to a sexually charged encounter. Beyond being vulnerable, an openness to the *eros* of communication and interaction is primed in the use of promiscuity. Both humans and machines have erotics, desires, and wants, and our critical vocabularies should account for those threads.

They must also account historically for intersectional interpretations. As Audre Lorde (1984) articulates, men have called women whores and crazy to keep them from knowing the potential of the erotic, defined as "an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire" (p. 88). Both Crimp and Lorde agree the erotic (and as I argue, promiscuity) have generative potential. But as scholars, we must be frank about the sensation of desire, especially due to the academic's well-documented prudeness toward the erotic (Bell & Sinclair, 2014). As Lorde warns later in her essay, "In order to be utilized, our erotic feelings must be recognized" (p. 90), and promiscuity highlights these feelings poignantly.

Queerness. Closely related to eroticism is the very queerness of the enterprise. By queerness, I mean gayness or all that is non-heterosexual. I distinguish between queerness sexually and politically (termed “messiness” below, though both aspects are always intertwined) in my observations, for sake of clarity. The history of promiscuity and mobility in queer communities is astounding and undeniable. As human beings who dare to love and/or pursue members of the same sex, we have always been mobile and sometimes in the shadows. As was more fully spun out in Chapter Two and is continued in Chapter Four, queer spaces are the affordance of technologies, typically sedentary, that provide the space and protection for queer love and queer love-making. Taking back the word promiscuity as a powerful, generative mobility is a worthwhile political cause, much like the transformation that queer has undertaken. Words like mobility are like stainless steel. They may never rust. Their texture is tough, and their power is to cut through multiple conversations with slick ease and efficiency. Mobility as a term comes at a dehistoricized cost. We can no longer deny the mass mobility of queers as a social, historically oppressed group, and promiscuity brings into focus the lady boys, tramps, homophiles, closet-cases, and the discrete with more efficiency than mobility.

While mobility could describe the following vignettes, the queer sexuality of the scenes is better emphasized through promiscuity:

Scene Four: I’m somehow sitting at The Exchange, a bar on Court Avenue in Downtown Des Moines. The Exchange, with its Wall St. theme and frat-boys-who-got-jobs-at-Wells-Fargo-after-graduation aura, is the last place I’d expect to encounter a suitor on Grindr, which is exactly what made trying to find men even more fun.

“Is this him?” I asked my friend, pointing to a (supposedly) 5’11” young professional a mere 382 feet away.

“No... I don’t think so,” she responded. I wasn’t convinced. I scrolled through numerous men who changed their display name to indicate which bar

they were at. Joker's. The Garden. The Saddle. Johnny's. Some of them gay bars, some not.

My phone died about a half hour later, which speaks in part to my poor charging habits and in part to the drain of so much GPS usage. The Exchange is great, but knowing that I had a portal to other men in such a hetero place? Worth it.

Scene Five: I hesitated. Not necessarily because I'm embarrassed. It's not that. This is what I study for crying out loud. I just don't see myself as the gayest of sorts. Letting heterosexual eyes enter Grindr felt like a betrayal, even though I don't know any of the other users. I reached for my bag.

"Here, let me show you," I said, whipping out my tablet.

"Oh my god, this is so juicy," Sarah (name changed) said, leaning past my hunched head to watch as I logged into Grindr.

"As you can see, it generates profiles on the basis of who's closest to me," I explained.

"I... I think that's my student. He gave a fabulous speech today," said Sarah, half embarrassed, half excited. As I scrolled through the profiles and shared some of my musings and experiences on the app, she turned to me.

"It is way more complicated for you all. I mean, I barely understand Tinder."

In the above vignettes, it is not enough to say mobilities are at play. It isn't even enough to say mobilities of desire are flowing. This state of "looking," this exploration and hunt for the knowing wink (Morris, 2002) has been a goading mobility for centuries. In a heteronormative culture, the circulation of queerness is not only viable; it's survival. Promiscuity serves as a reminder of the LGBTQIA experiences latent in mobilities, paying homage to those still passing and forced to act the part in an immobile situation. In short, anxieties about the queerness of mobilities and the mobility of queerness are better addressed by adopting promiscuity.

Morals. Deploying promiscuity, for many of the reasons outlined in this chapter, invites questions of morals. These questions are productive, critical inquires that begin exploring the valuations read upon or emergent within moments of promiscuity. Who decides what is rendered good or bad? Vulnerable or not? What disciplinary forces are

attempting to prohibit this promiscuity? Encourage it for gain? Is this good or bad? Is this behavior ethical? What holds people back from mobility or promiscuity? What pushes the celebration of mobility, visibility, or promiscuity? Promiscuity leaves enough space for us to push back and check ourselves against such disciplinary forces. Within mobilities research, a mobility and visibility bias exists—a belief that it's best to be mobile than to be sedentary. However, it is only with an incredible amount of privilege one may move out and away from their (homophobic) node.

Promiscuity evokes questions about the moral and the disciplinary, as evidenced in this next vignette:

Scene Six: Being on Grindr when visiting my hometown is always such a crapshoot. Coming from a small Iowa town outside of Des Moines, attention on Grindr can be hard to come by. The profile nearest to me is usually five miles away in Grimes, and I'm on the outside, looking in. I can see gay acquaintances from my Myspace days living it up in Des Moines, doing their thing at Le Boi or looking for conversation, but Granger isn't the place to be.

Christmas 2014 has been an exception. I logged on, just out of habit, to see a familiar face a little over 4000 feet away. Mark. I've changed his name here, but he was older than me in school. Easy on the eyes. Always assumed to be straight. But there he was, gay as can be on Grindr. I could not believe it. Nobody from high school would believe it either. I went to screen capture his profile to text it out to my friends back home, but I paused. Is it my job to out him? I'm not going to say he made my own closeted life all that much easier, but is it my place to share that information? In the end, I didn't, but even writing this today, to eventually be debated, discussed, and published, makes me question whether I should even offer this narrative.

The mobilities paradigm, or put differently, the scholarly move to adopt a focus on the movements and stoppages within social life, in many ways pushes scholars to document, study, and publish about what is visible. I can clearly see the protest happening. I can participate in this public festival about gender equality. I can do all of these things from the vantage point of privilege. Such dominant, public identities are so often only able to be out in the light because they have been interpellated into an

acceptable subject position in the first place. In this vignette, it's unclear what effect the unsavory associations with Grindr will have on perceptions of my schoolmate or even on me. While mobility may be an apt term to talk about the swirling histories of visiting my hometown, promiscuity allows me as a critic to consider the political and ethical tensions surrounding the act of outing another within Scene Six and its inclusion within this thesis generally. Mobility, as a concept, often does not go far enough; the promiscuous standpoint opens space for confronting already existing morality machines, ethically questionable situations, and our political and scholarly biases against Others. Playing with promiscuity over mobility demonstrates a commitment to taking up questions of morals and discipline within the realm of the mobile that proactively prompts questions of ethics over and over again.

Messiness. Promiscuity is not a cut and dry, black and white term. Numerous binary relationships can be addressed within moments of promiscuity. The term itself straddles and prances among seemingly separate and bright lines implicated by the previous four categories: safety/vulnerability, virgin/sexual, straight/queer, and pious/deviant, for starters. Other relevant relationships promiscuity works through are discussed within much work about sexuality. The divide between the public and private, already implicated by Grindr itself as discussed previously, is the realm of the promiscuous, with private acts potentially happening in a public and a public infiltrating private behaviors and spaces. Also, the closely aligned connections of passing and promiscuity, as teased out above, forefronts the problematic visibility bias driving many studies about mobility, reminding the scholar that indeed promiscuity is blue and happening even when we are not invited to its intelligibility. Again, queerness and

promiscuity intertwine in less categorically pure ways than this typology allows, but as a native term to queer experience, the messiness of promiscuity taps into a historically and politically shared experience.

The messiness of Grindr and its promiscuity flowed into my professional life, as noted in the following vignette:

Scene Seven: “Hey,” the message read. I constantly check Grindr on phone because it’s always on me, but when it comes my tablet, messages like this can pile up often. They’re mostly from spam bots and roving men from around the area without distinguishing pictures.

“Photo received,” the next message said. And there he is, mirror shot and all in designer undies with absolutely no cares in the world. Receiving pictures unsolicited is not the norm, especially when this account doesn’t have a face picture itself. I click out of the profile, and I recognize him. He’s a friend of one of my students. Never has this guy been under my watch, and he will almost certainly never be. But wow.

Now, I’ve grown accustomed to seeing my students on Grindr; it’s not like I’m identifying that I am looking to hook up. Possessing two profiles, one with my picture and one not, I can assume they’ve scrolled past my photo (unless being 24 has become much too passé, and I’m filtered out at the start). Some of the students I see on Grindr know this is what I research; some just know that I apparently have sex with men. But it’s exhausting playing this game of “Is he my student? Is HE my student?” I wonder how I would have reacted to seeing a teacher on Grindr four years ago. What residue carries over into the classroom?

Promiscuity highlights, instead of hides, these murky, messy issues. On one hand, the identification of me as an instructor can be affirmative for gay students on a homophobic campus. My locative media travels with me, displaying my homosexual status as an invitation for allyship with other queer students. On the other hand, Grindr forecloses my ability to be strategically ambiguous (or to pass completely) in the classroom, which can sometimes be personally beneficial. The only constant with promiscuity is the oscillation between these messy, moving parts. It’s a tension of discourses, performativities, identities, desires, and expectations that both limits and generates new material, social, symbolic, and affective relationships with others and

myself. I find it a stretch to uphold mobility as being more attuned to binaries when queerness and promiscuity are constantly navigating them to exist. As such, I believe affirming promiscuity is a queerly more appropriate language and scholarly choice for this and future projects.

Worthy of Reclamation?

In this chapter, I have proposed a shift in the mobilities paradigm toward promiscuity. Throughout these pages, I questioned how Grindr offers queers the space and material to be more mobile, more promiscuous. Specifically, I explored passing as a queer mobility, putting the passing and mobilities literatures in much needed conversation. Of course, the goal of gay liberation is to reach a place where no individual ever feels the need to pass as something they are not, to forge a queerer and safer world that stamps out heteronormative and other interlocking privileges. To calibrate scholars interested in mobility to the potentials of such a world, I revived promiscuity as an organizing heuristic due to its grounded political and pedagogical goals. I contend Grindr is just one site of queer mobility that examples how scholars interested in mobility need better vocabularies like promiscuity to discuss the messy vulnerabilities of queer life.

Though I have outlined five affordances of the word promiscuity, there are certainly limitations, most notably on the basis of gender. Women have historically been silenced by men and those in power for their non-stationary behavior— shouting, orating, listening, moving, and existing outside the symbolic and material boundaries of patriarchy (Zaeske, 1995). Speaking engagements involving both men and women were considered inappropriate and “promiscuous,” keeping women from the political debates

of the day. Though the U.S. is almost 100 years past this controversy, patriarchal binaries of virginity and sexualization still trap women in a double bind related to promiscuity.

The troubles with promiscuous may be even further compounded when intersectionally interrogated. Slutwalks and this thesis about Grindr may seem unrelated, but they both grapple with the impact of the racist, sexist, colonialist residue carried through language. Words like slut (and perhaps promiscuity) possess long histories that are enacted in their utterance. Is promiscuity a white-washed theoretical and political term only deemed worthy of reclamation due to male privilege? Is completely new language, without the possibility of such pejorative, racist and sexist baggage needed? Or is this baggage part of promiscuity's power as a word used to justify and individualize the deaths of thousands of gay men during the AIDS epidemic due to their supposedly loose morals? Further historical research and honest conversations are needed to address the entire scope of promiscuity's impact. Though I have easily explored Grindr through the lens of promiscuity, it is certainly possible Grindr is socially afforded greater promiscuous status due to its masculine, individualistic disposition and my unearned positionality. Such privileges should be acknowledged.

However, I believe promiscuity may account for such imbalances in (gendered and racial) power through its fourth affordance of morals. By tracing spaces and acts of promiscuity, we as critics are confronted with the disciplining systems that dis/allow certain bodies to traverse and perform various mobilities. It is not necessarily the fault of the word or the act of promiscuity; rather, promiscuity as an organizing term goads questions of justice and agency as articulated in and through social relations deemed

promiscuous. And it is only from a point of privilege we can ignore the promiscuous. As Berlant and Warner (1998) observe:

Respectable gays like to think they owe nothing to the sexual subculture they think of as sleazy. But their success, their way of living, their political rights, and their very identities would never have been possible but for the existence of the public sexual culture [read: promiscuity] they now despise. (p. 563)

By acknowledging, celebrating, and looking for the promiscuous, we can assure this (homo)normative disciplining is corrected for in our work and our politics alike.

We must.

In addition to proposing new language, this chapter may leave you with some questions. For example, you may ask, “In what other ways can Grindr work for and against the normative? And now knowing the constitutive and promiscuous nature of Grindr, what can we do with this information?” In the next and concluding chapter, I address these issues pragmatically, politically, and theoretically.

Chapter 4: Conclusions, Discussions, and Queer Application Making

Locative media and their mobilities possess numerous potentials and pitfalls. As documented and discussed in this thesis, Grindr is a widely used gay application that produces discourses, identities, and spaces of promiscuous mobility. Whether documenting how the interface of Grindr constitutes its users as the center of homonormative spaces or reclaiming the word promiscuity to better describe the application's brand of vulnerability, passing, and messy mobility, this thesis has demonstrated the necessity of a critical, rhetorical perspective to fully understand Grindr.

I have to acknowledge how easy it may seem to write off Grindr as inconsequential or a passing fad. Perhaps it can be read as a hiccup in an ever-expanding attention economy. It would pain me to admit it, but maybe some of the people with whom I've talked about this project were right to quip, "It's just an app." However, I believe these previous chapters have successfully situated Grindr as more than an empty indulgence by clarifying its place in ongoing political and theoretical conversations about queer mobility. While future readers of this thesis may never know what "a Grindr" is, I have documented how this application functions as a current, amorphous, and imperfect technological invention that limits identity but offers increased mobility for queer individuals and communities in 2015. Grindr in many ways contains, limits, and individualizes gay experience, but it also works against the grain of homonormative cultural expectations to pursue marriage. It's messy. It's potentially fleeting. Most of all, Grindr's promiscuous and a useful gay-centered contribution to the growing fields of networked rhetoric and mobilities. Regardless, if the previous chapters of close-reading

and theoretical exploration in this thesis have not provided sufficient evidence of Grindr's impact, then the shift in analysis within this conclusion may be fruitful.

In this final chapter, I “critically reverse engineer” Grindr. Gehl (2015) proposes and defines reverse engineering as “a method of producing knowledge by dissociating human-made artifacts. This knowledge is then used to produce new artifacts that improve upon the old and yet also bear a relation to the old” (p. 1-2). In other words, I move forward in this thesis by proposing solutions to the problematic, constitutive aspects of Grindr I have discussed in Chapter Two and while maintaining the promiscuity celebrated in Chapter Three. These previous chapters have worked to better understand Grindr academically, rhetorically, and promiscuously with the goal to then “open it up, take it apart, probe it, test it, stress it, break it, peer inside, and learn how it works” (Gehl, 2015, p. 2) culturally, discursively, and politically. From this vantage point, it makes sense to apply the four phases of reverse engineering: the pragmatic, genealogical, legal, and normative. In doing so, I actively hedge against the all too simple critiques that critical and humanistic theorizing, in digital realms or otherwise, does little to address the problems they discover.

In addition to the reverse engineering below, this last chapter unfolds through a series of implications. They work on three levels: the historical, the political, and the theoretical. Taken together, I frame Grindr as one iteration in a rich history of promiscuous mobility and gay spaces. By situating Grindr in the technological past, political present, and theoretical future, I demonstrate that Grindr indeed possesses a long lasting impact that easily deflects many of the critiques lobbed at popular and vernacular texts by more traditional interlocutors.

Critically Reverse Engineering Grindr

Pragmatic. Critical reverse engineers are not the hardliners in the room. By taking the products or software they have at hand, reverse engineers do not analyze imagined technology. Rather, they ask questions of what already exists. It should not be assumed that this process is simply descriptive or appreciative. When engineers sit down to develop technology, they juggle just as many factors as the critic like the social, political, economic, legal, sexual, and personal. Critical reverse engineering looks to unpack the choices made in a product's development with the actual materials at hand.

How does one go about carrying out this pragmatic critique, though? "A great deal of this process entails the discovery of 'facts' discerned through thick, close, detailed empirical analysis of technical objects," writes Gehl (2015, p. 4). He notes that reverse engineers ask questions like "How does the technology work? What is it comprised of? Who built it? What might their intentions have been? What can we do with it?" (p. 4). This aligns nicely with the close reading this thesis undertook in Chapter Two, but it is not a perfect fit. While critical reverse engineering is a useful heuristic, the scope of this thesis is more on the rhetoricity and potentials of user experience than on the exploration of Grindr's birth. I believe I maintained the essence of Gehl's call while mapping the constitutive functions of Grindr's mobile interface. I have worked with the existing materials of Grindr to tease out not just what Grindr means but what it does. My analysis moved past inquiring into how to use Grindr and rather concerned itself with how Grindr is using us.

Though I am taking a moment to pat my own scholarly back, there are some pieces of analysis closer to Gehl's vision that I would like to add to my close reading of

Grindr. These additions are more on the psychological and social levels, musing about the intentions and possibilities of Grindr as a tool currently. Beyond its ability to make oodles of money, I want to give a charitable take on Grindr's purpose and formation. Though it may seem backwards to discuss Grindr's formation in the conclusion of this document, I believe the story of its inception is useful to corroborate some of my findings. In a 2014 interview with Fortune magazine, Grindr founder and CEO Joel Simkhai meditated on why he created the application. According to the interview, earlier forms of online dating didn't work out for Simkhai. "It was far too time consuming to seek people out, he thought. There ought to be a better way" (Besette, 2014, para. 3). That better way was the locative specificity of Grindr. Later in the interview, Simkhai celebrates the constant updates Grindr makes to address ease of use and simplicity in its design. Grindr, as an application, truly does want men to meet other men.

Additionally, Simkhai affirms and problematizes the ideology undergirding the constitutive work of Grindr's communication systems by highlighting the political outreach made by "Grindr for Equality." Grindr for Equality is an advocacy group that couples with Grindr to repurpose men's GPS data to send personalized appeals for users to participate in formal politics by calling legislators about upcoming gay rights votes and pushing for legal protections internationally. The dyadic locking of communication in Grindr indeed echoes calls in contemporary gay rights discourse (as accentuated by Grindr for Equality) to normalize the sexual activity of queer men. While this lifestyle may work for some, it's important to remember not everyone can or even desires to eschew their promiscuity for this formal recognition.

As Von Burg (2014) recalls from Anderson's (2013) *Us and Them? The Dangerous Politics of Immigration Controls*, those who obtain formal rights and recognition from a government “maintain the burden to be not only citizens, but “good citizens” who ‘demonstrate super citizenship’ that embodies the ideal values of the community as imagined by those who allowed them inside of it” (p. 250). As others have argued, most clearly by Warner (2002), this citizenship is usually heteronormative, capitalistic, and growingly homonormative. Though a variety of avenues, strategies, and ideological positions are nourished in our (once) vibrant queer liberation movements, both my reading of Grindr's interface and interviews with Simkhai point toward a specific, hegemonic gayness that drove Grindr's creation and can be found in its current design.

Genealogical. In addition to a pragmatic, grounded approach, critical reverse engineers use the history of technology as a source for invention. It's easy to think of reverse engineering as being a completely future-oriented operation. In many ways, this is true. However, each object is not a completely new creation. Technologies are built from previously articulated and complex patterns, trends, and decisions. The reverse engineer then possesses a duty to spin out an understanding of how the current product came to be.

This orientation flips production on its head. Instead of starting with a light bulb or an electric dream and crafting technology to match this vision, “reverse engineering reconstructs the abstract ideas the original designers *may* have held in the construction of the artifact” (Gehl, 2014, p. 7, emphasis in original). In reverse engineering, practitioners take up as much source material as they can to reconstruct a history of the processes used

to craft the product: items like handbooks, blueprints, memos, prototypes, lines of code, defunct alternative products, undergirding theories, and older technologies. It is this last item I take up in this section, tracing the historical and social technologies Grindr has built upon and synthesized in its current state. I maintain that gay space and its promiscuity have been reproduced through multiple technologies, and Grindr is simply one of the latest. However, Grindr diverges with previous emphases on strictly material queer spaces like Fire Island, tearooms, and other public, static locations celebrated by many queer scholars (see Leap, 1999). Such material spaces and practices have rearticulated themselves within and have been repurposed by Grindr. Below, I tease out three historically-situated queer technologies I see present within Grindr: gay bars, hanky code, and personal ads.

Gay bars, as described and problematized in Chapter Two, are formal, material spaces for homo *eros*. Technologies as simple as a gay bar's walls are clearly articulated through Grindr. Grindr's utilization of mobile phones creates a discretion that allows for a more private, homo-centric experience, as opposed to other dating sites like OkCupid where both straight and same-sex attracted users can interact. A logic of consumption is also derived from the gay bar on Grindr (though obviously capital is a little more ubiquitous than a drag venue alone)—the insistent “pay to play” model of Grindr harkens back to the reality that bars are spaces for interaction, yes, but only while buying products. Shots, beer, and Sex on the Beaches are translated into undies, filters, and more expansive home screens.

Hanky code, according to linguists Cage and Evans (2003), originated in San Francisco during the gold rush (and has since made its way onto Grindr). With too few

women available as adequate dance partners, miners would put handkerchiefs in their back pockets to indicate whether they'd like to lead or follow in the dance. The code was revived by gay men in loud, incommunicable bar settings in the 1970s to easily dictate sexual preferences. Hanky code, in brief, uses handkerchief colors as sexual genres while the pocket from which a hanky hangs indicates a preferred position of dominant/active or submission/passive. For example, if a dark blue hanky is worn in the left hand pocket, this man is a top. If a black hanky is worn in the right pocket, this specifies the wearer enjoys being the receiver in BDSM play. Obviously, these codes are not mutually exclusive, so different hankies in different pockets may be flagged by the same person. It should be said that hanky code is not really used by U.S. gay men in contemporary times, but it remains a classic symbolic system in queer communities and one picked up by Grindr as an app. The filters and search functions of Grindr mirror the social sorting of hanky code. The Tribe labels can indicate some preferences for play like leather or HIV-friendly partnership, and the "Looking For" section invites or shuts down further communication between gay men in the same space.

Personal ads build upon the hanky code by distinguishing the body through a literary means, a move which also appears on Grindr. Personal advertisements disembodiment the experience of finding a partner for play. You aren't able to see a person at the other end of a newspaper. As such, generic descriptions of individuals became a norm of the form, listing items like race, height, weight, and so forth. The same goes for Grindr. Due to the passing nature of blank profiles or discrete users, statistical information supplements the lack of visual confirmation. Though statistics aren't enough and shirtless

pictures are often asked of potential partners, it is clear personal ads as a genre have shaped the form of Grindr as an application.

Legal. Critical reverse engineering is an established act of legal resistance as well. As a process, reverse engineering has in many ways reverse engineered copyright law itself. However, the digital turn and software engineering have complicated this standing, since the idea and its execution are so intertwined. In short, copying the functionality of software is legal and reproducible, but the means to originally make that function via inventional coding schemes is copyright protected. An overwhelming DIY ethic comes with reverse engineering, and the legal orientation reminds users that such exploration is safe. Despite the slippery status of copyright law, reverse engineering has been a useful, strategic rhetoric for those advocating for fair use, and building Creative Commons-style legal commitments into the DNA of projects allows reverse engineers to give legs to their work beyond their own controls.

Where this legal orientation gets more complicated is in its execution as a humanistic scholar. By no means am I a legal scholar. As such, I play with Gehl's typology to examine and include the ethical issues driving and constraining my reverse engineering. Some of these topics, like the politics of outing passers on Grindr within a user's social network or in the classroom, were discussed in Chapter Three. Some legal questions can be addressed, though. For example, the very act of writing this thesis implicates me in tensions over fair use and reverse engineering. What repercussions can come from breaking down Grindr from a critical standpoint? Realistically, "like fair use, reverse engineering is an exception that only works when people use it" (Gehl, 2014, p. 9), and I encourage others to likewise continue in this tradition.

Normative. Reverse engineering asks the scholar to get their hands dirty. After working to understand what a technology does, the history of its creation, and how it is situated within a complex legal context, the time has come to create something new, mining these three topics for insights. Usability and profitability are the main drivers of traditional reverse engineering (much like interface criticism, as discussed in Chapter One). In critical reverse engineering, the end goal is broader (if not a little lofty): social, sexual, economic, media, fill-in-your-politic justice. The shift in thinking occurring here for critical scholars is the positive, pragmatic move encouraged by Gehl. In striking a balance between agency-sparse critique and unreflexive fandom, critical reverse engineering makes practical, situated suggestions in hopes of changing the conditions in the present and to provide a directions for future iterations of a technology.

Gehl hones in on a tension I have found while writing this piece. On the one hand, Grindr is problematic in its constitutive force. However, it also enables increased promiscuity and passing in ways that other forms of gay space have yet to materialize. How can we maintain the possibility of identification, promiscuity, and queerness of Grindr while eschewing the neoliberalism of its practices? To be honest, I do not have a definitive answer. How such an alternative application would unfold is not the direct focus of this project, and I invite any and all code-minded allies to take up the contributions of this thesis in collaboration. Interlocutor, I am. However, I do not make claims to have fully fulfilled Gehl's mission in establishing critical reverse engineering, and future projects may spawn in mutually beneficial directions that are simply outside of the scope of this thesis.

But what are my recommendations for an alternative engineering of Grindr? My changes to Grindr take into account what I've learned and mused throughout the writing of this thesis. I hope to dispel the many homonormative and atomizing features explored in Chapter Two while emphasizing the politics of productive promiscuity in Chapter Three. As I reimagine Grindr, my alterations are four fold.

Expanded Chats. Fetishizing the dyad must stop. If the current chat screen and its functionality are maintained, then it should be easy to make group chat threads available to users. Options to "Add Member" to an already established chat bubble could be an easy fix to a homonormative structure. This allows friendlier and polyamorous courting. Though some may complain that spam bots will utilize this feature obnoxiously, Grindr already monitors for overuse, and the block button can be used to address harassment from human or non-human participants.

User-Generated Labels. Tribes, as a portion of Grindr, should be renamed to something less Othering like "labels." Perhaps even "hankies" could work. Regardless of its name, users need the ability to distinguish themselves however they may choose. Instead of prescribing said stereotypes, an open-sourced system of tags should be instituted. This would offer more honest self-description and nuanced search functions. The labels could be edited lightly by Grindr's staff to maintain its current obscenity rules, or it could be left alone, depending on the regulatory practices of the device's app store.

Unfiltered Home Screens. In the spirit of pragmatism, I believe Grindr's filtering functions, despite their problems, may be useful for users. We all possess romantic preferences that should be respected (though problematized). The main issue with Grindr's filtering is that all filtration happens on the home screen. Many men just simply

disappear from the gay space because they do not meet a specific category or label desired by the user. Erasing swathes of community members isn't sustainable. Both functions can exist; the home screen can be rendered unalterable while a new tab for searches (rife with the already existing filters) can be utilized for one-time queries, much in the same manner as current dating sites like OkCupid.

Home Screen Generation. With so much of this project's critiques occurring at the level of the rendering algorithms used to display other users' profiles, a failure to propose an alternative to this portion of Grindr would be shortsighted. Though what I envision is but one potential alternative, I believe it addresses many of the issues I noted, primarily that Grindr relocates users to a passive, consumer position in the center of gay space instead constituting users as members of a collective gay space.

I argue engineers can better address the tension between interface customization and the ability for users to be co-present (as opposed to erased) on Grindr. One way to achieve this is by allowing users to set the geographic circumference from whence others' profiles are populated. Put differently, the home screen would "cut off" profiles outside a user-defined radius, as opposed to the infinite distance limit of the 100 closest profiles. Users would decide if their home screen shows users from 0 feet to an unlimited number of feet away. The profiles within this chosen proximity would be randomly generated instead of ordered from closest to farthest, breaking down the "me"-centric logic for a "we"-centered user experience. To address some aspects of the asymmetrical, rural experience of being on the "outside (of the city) looking in," users would only be visible in overlapping proximities.

For example, if I have calibrated my interface to generate from 2 miles away and the neighbor from Scene One in Chapter Three also has his profile set to 2 miles away, we would see each other in the pool of randomly populated users. However, imagine we are both still at home, and I have switched my circumference to 5 feet away, his to 2 miles. Neither of us would populate on the other's screen due to the mismatch on my end—I would likely not match with anyone at all due to the tight circumference I have deployed. It would certainly be a process of trial and error to pick the most productive ratio for your social and material reality. That cannot be denied. However, with the option for user-decided pre-settings, I can envision a Grindr that privileges co-presence while still accepting and enhancing the digital and promiscuous nature of Grindr.

Political Implications

Beyond the historical and pragmatic considerations discussed in the previous section, this thesis has also explored some on-going political issues. While these topics inform the impact of this thesis, they are not always directly engaged or defined within its text. Below, I discuss two areas in which Grindr and this analysis may prove useful for reflection and interrogation.

Risk, Vulnerability, and the Control Society. On a macro scale, this thesis links the data spewing machinery that is Grindr with Deleuze's (1992) notion of the control society. "The disciplinary man was a discontinuous producer of energy," writes Deleuze, "but the man of control is undulatory, in orbit, in a continuous network" (p. 4-5). I echo this idea, understanding static notions of gay space as no longer an apt conceptualization for gay experiences so mediated through Grindr. Instead of being trapped by the fear of violence, a third space now exists that osculates between "in" and "out" of the closet, one

that hides in plain sight. Applications like Grindr make this subjectivity possible and profitable, a reiteration of Deleuze's observation that "...the societies of control operate with machines of a third type, computers, whose passive danger is jamming and whose active one is piracy and the introduction of viruses" (p. 6).

Grindr continuously collects user data and ad revenue in this control society fashion, simultaneously pushing vulnerability and risk onto its users. While places like gay businesses and bars have been subjected to closures and harassment in the past, the personalization of gay space moves the potential (for harm) into the pockets of its users. Such (mis)uses of data collected by Grindr have been already been coopted by traditional disciplinary agents. For example, Egyptian authorities are passing as gay men on Grindr, using the application's promiscuous and mobile potential to arrest men for homosexual acts (Noack, 2014).

However, promiscuity may be a line of flight out of this totalizing system of control. Yes, my critical reverse engineering in this chapter may be seen as an active participation in a recalibration of Grindr to further subsume the communicative labor of gay men. However, what if promiscuity is the way above and beyond the confines of the control society? What if more use, as opposed to boycott, is politically generative? Can the indiscriminate movement and play of users exceed control? As I note in Chapter Three, networked media possesses intimate connections to queer theory and the pedagogical language of the AIDS epidemic. Promiscuity may be a social, viral practice to challenge the ubiquitous computers Deleuze discusses above. As evidenced in Egypt, Grindr (for some time) afforded gay men increased mobility and promiscuity in a manner much less risky than the corporeal harms of boycotting technology and pursuing desire in

public. These users, despite wielding a data spewing application like Grindr, still managed to “pass” the control mechanisms of Egypt’s homophobic surveillance and machinery due to their promiscuous movement. In short, an application like Grindr provides very real material and political consequences for its passing users both in the U.S. and abroad, and the potential productivity of promiscuity against the grasp of control deserves further discussion and research.

Passing on Visibility Politics. Chapter Three and the previous section discussed the increased promiscuous potential opened up by Grindr, but such action also complicates the necessity and politics of being “out” in individualized, homonormative ways. While I primarily discuss the current homonormative obsession with marriage throughout this thesis, Duggan (2002) warned readers about homonormative identities in gay spaces long before Grindr existed. Homonormativity, for Duggan, is “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (p. 179).

Grindr can enable homonormative behaviors that affirm long-standing homophobic and conservative discourses flung against queer individuals. Queerness and sex have historically been considered private affairs (even though they often happened together in public privately). Grindr can hide queer interactions and hook ups for men who have sex with men by making passing that much easier. This new intimacy erases the visibility politics relied upon before. Historically, walking to bars, visiting gayborhoods, and attending pride events materially changed gay spaces and created safety in numbers while offering a place to corroborate experiences of homophobia.

However, “straight acting” and passing individuals on Grindr now no longer need to be seen since they can privately access other men who have sex with men at any time. They’re queer without experiencing the history or stigma. This potentially pushes the public/private divide back toward privatization, actually creating less materially marked gay space than existed in the first place. Though I offer no satisfying answers to this private/public tension, it is important to recognize this is always an on-going debate in queer communities, and hopefully this thesis can give better language and description to how Grindr is or isn’t participating in homonormativity.

Theoretical Implications

Though the politics of this thesis are deeply entangled with its scholarly contributions, three theoretical moves have been made in this thesis regarding Grindr generally, the study of interfaces, and the mobility of passing.

Grindr Scholarship. This thesis provides a necessary critical-rhetoric perspective toward Grindr. While blurring the lines between the rhetorical and the qualitative, I have demonstrated Grindr is more than a means of communicating; Grindr communicates itself. Such a rhetorical, procedural analysis adds a new dimension to what we know about Grindr’s impact, documenting how its structure affects users’ conceptions of self and gay spaces. Though only slightly discussed in this project, further research may explore how the individualized nature of Grindr encourages risky behavior and how the texture of Grindr’s gay space affects and reflects more traditional forms of cruising and co-presence.

Interface Rhetoric. I demonstrate of one style of interface critique in this thesis. To accomplish my criticism, I threaded together multiple conversations within rhetoric to

capture the constitutive function of Grindr. By understanding interface as both a social and material relationship, this project methodologically pushed both digital and *in situ* approaches towards each other through close-reading and auto/ethnography. Indeed, I show how digital and networked spaces can be studied from an experiential and material standpoint. I encourage other critics to continue playing with various vocabularies as I have done here in hopes to increase the amount of interface criticism in communication studies and other interested fields.

Passing and Mobility. I expand both the literature about passing and mobility in this essay. Passing, when viewed through the lens of affordance, is more than an individual rhetor duping in-group members. An inherently mobile term, passing involves entire scenes of actors, objects, and relationships working simultaneously as a verb and a noun. Mobility studies must better sensitize itself to those bodies and relations in motion, in passing on Grindr. I have suggested scholars instead look for moments of promiscuity to account for queer experiences like passing. Future research should test, challenge, expand, and break the topoi of promiscuity I have proposed. Whether it is promiscuity or another organizing term, we must still work towards adequately accounting for queer mobility's messy vulnerabilities, sexualities, and morals eminent with every act.

Logging Off

Grindr appeared in 2009 and still sustains itself in 2015 with more of a whimper than a bang. As one of the many pieces of digital equipment (queer) people engage, the application joins a myriad of formal and informal ways of knowing yourself as gay. This thesis is my attempt to interpret, critique, and engineer a more equitable relationship between Grindr, myself, and the networked communities I call home. By mapping the

homonormative and constitutive functions of Grindr's interface and exploring the promiscuity and passing afforded by the application, I hope you can more easily envision technologies and gay spaces that better invite co-presence, politics, and play. For all we know, such an iteration already exists. If not, may we work to build it together.

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