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Discrete and looking (to profit): Homoconnectivity on Grindr*

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Abstract

The queer dating and hookup app Grindr evidences a technological and economic intensification in queer spaces online. The dominant modality of capitalist power is no longer consumerist norms but the collection and analysis of data. Grindr’s participation in datafication distributes increased risks upon its queer users and necessitates a renewed politics of queer privacy beyond homonormativity. I name this arrangement of power homoconnectivity and detail four techniques that capitalism deploys to capture and monetize queer social production. Ultimately, this article unpacks how Grindr designs experiences that move users to log into the app while hiding its engagement with multi-sided markets. Oscillating between producing continuous experiences and deploying annoying constraints, platforms like Grindr privatize and monetize user spaces, communities, social production, and lives under the guise of increased connectivity. With the goal of building more just queer worlds, homoconnectivity makes legible new pressure points to push back against the growing ubiquity of capitalist datafication and queer world-taking.

Keywords: Datafication, digital rhetoric, homonormativity, interface, platforms, privacy

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*This is not a homophonic flub. On the one hand, the article to come traces how Grindr cracks queer intimacies into “discrete” parts through datafication, and on the other, Grindr places risk upon queer lives and necessitates a new orientation to “discretion,” to privacy. Oh! and the phrases “discreet” and “looking” are common refrains on Grindr.

Love, Simon's (2018) sugary-sweet, queer coming-of-age narrative can evidence that there is more to queer media politics than representation. Take the following exchange between Simon and his father, Nick (Godfrey, Bowen, Shahbazian, Klausner, & Berlanti, 2018). After a quick hug and apology for his casual homophobia, Simon's dad offers, "Hey. I thought maybe we could sign up for Grindr together." Simon puts his hands in his pockets, digging for the right thing to say: "You don't know what Grindr is, do you?" "It's Facebook for gay people!" flexes Nick, stepping inside their house and into his newfound allyship. Looking down, Simon says plainly, " ... not what it is," before following his dad through the doorway.

Obviously, Simon's dad could have used more background information about Grindr. Released in 2009, Grindr is a geolocative mobile application with over 3.8 million daily active users who are primarily men-who-have-sex-with-men, as well as transwomen and non-binary individuals (Bucksense & Grindr, 2018). Arranging hookups is predominately why people log into Grindr (Licoppe, Rivière, & Morel, 2016), and other uses include simply passing the time, coordinating sex work, chatting with queer friends, organizing intimate and sometimes non-sexual chemsex sessions, generally locating oneself within a broader queer community, and consensually exchanging self-pornography (Ahlm, 2017; Brennan, 2017; Cassidy, 2018; Hakim, 2019; Miles, 2017; Tziallas, 2015). Researchers have argued Grindr, due the app's networked immediacy and the relative discreetness of cell phones, can challenge the heteronormativity of otherwise contextually "straight" spaces (Batiste, 2013). Affordances like this can make Grindr feel like a hard break with previous queer spaces. However, Mowlabocus (2010) pointed out that Grindr is one technology in a long history that demonstrates how the seemingly firm lines between the public-private, online-offline "are at best, difficult to maintain, and at worse, fabrications that conceal the truth of" queer subcultures' terrains (p. 15). These similarities do not stop at the public-private, online-offline divide; Grindr and its users' communication often reaffirm the long history of inequalities sustained in otherwise "inclusive" queer spaces along power lines like citizen status, class, and whiteness (Shield, 2019).

In this article, I argue that Simon—not his dad—is mistaken. Grindr and Facebook are more similar than different. They are platforms that bring together users, corporate partners, and even governments who have a vested interest in "the systematic collection, algorithmic

processing, circulation, and monetization of user data” (van Dijck, Poell, & de Waal, 2018, p. 4). Thinking with Grindr and similar apps extends previous work about queer commercialization online (Campbell, 2005), privacy (Fuchs, 2012), technoliberalism (Pfister & Yang, 2018), and platform studies (van Dijck, 2013) to better enunciate the material and political stakes for queer people in this current mutation of capitalism. I offer the concept of homoconnectivity¹ to illuminate the risks LGBTQ people as a group face online—not just because Grindr encourages stranger sociability (Albury & Byron, 2016) but due to datafication (Crain, 2018; Mai, 2016).

I am not alone in this concern. In March 2019, *Reuters* reported that the Federal Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) notified Grindr’s parent company Beijing Kunlun Tech, after considering its plan for an initial public offering, the organization needed to sell the app outright since its Chinese ownership posed a U.S. national security risk (O’Donnell, Baker, & Wang, 2019). This follows a U.S. government trend of questioning how companies located in China might be pressured by the Chinese government to give up user data. In the case of Grindr, its collection of users’ sex practices, locations, and serostatuses could make rich fodder for Chinese agents to coerce people who might not be openly queer into carrying out military and corporate espionage (Finley, 2019). Despite the fact the CFIUS rescinded its objections in July 2019 (Yang, 2019), this anxiety over queer data is not just some Cold War hangover. Grindr’s (2018) Terms of Service boldly declare that by logging into the app “you consent to the transfer and processing of [y]our data in the United States of America and any other jurisdiction throughout the world” (“Use Outside the United States,” para. 1). In a heteronormative world with surveilling governments and corporations unaccountable for their privacy practices, the distribution of risk placed on queer people online calls for further theorizing and political action.

In what follows, I establish the concept of homoconnectivity to then zoom into Grindr as a specific instantiation of its data extraction. I join a growing group of scholars (Faris, 2018; Race, 2015; Shield, 2018; Woo, 2015; Yeo & Fung, 2018) taking Grindr itself as a text to counteract a general trend in queer media research that “treats the medium of delivery—television, radio, film, the internet, and so on—as neutral, universal, or presumptively masculine” (Shaw & Sender, 2016, p. 1). The remainder of this article unfolds in three main moves. First, I animate

homoconnectivity to illuminate how platform capitalism and datafication affect queer users in queer-for-queer online spaces. This sets the stage to, second, analyze Grindr's design, following how the app creates user experiences that teeter-totter between continuity and constraint to smooth over the app's multiple market pressures to render and collect user data, advertise, and obtain purchases of its subscription service. I end with a brief meditation on the media struggles and futures of homoconnectivity.

Reading (for capitalism) is fundamental: from homonormativity to homoconnectivity

Grindr functions as more than a means to locate queer individuals in real time. The people who access Grindr are always navigating the interdependence between their social locations and histories, capitalism, offline physical environments, other users, and the app itself. I phase through these dynamic relationships—my experience as a Grindr user, the rhetorical nudges of Grindr's design, and the logics of capitalism—with a figure/ground orientation that looks at, through, and around the app. In other words, I see my task moving forward as twofold: to establish homoconnectivity as a term to sensitize scholars to a contemporary figuration of capitalism affecting queer people and to illuminate how Grindr, as a localized space participating in homoconnectivity, deploys the design logics of continuity and constraint to direct user experiences. To build a scaffolding for my analysis, I introduce a more supple definition of homoconnectivity in this section and link it to extractive capitalism, privacy, and platform-driven datafication.

I define homoconnectivity as an arrangement of power that extracts profits and potentiality from queer communities through online spaces, social media, technologies, and/or software. I draw upon van Dijck's (2013) insight that connectivity is a rhetoric, goal, opportunity, and trap promoted by online companies to attract users (pp. 12–13, 16). Because this connectivity shapes and limits human sociality (van Dijck, 2013, p. 4), I focus on homoconnectivity to make legible how capitalism specifically impacts queer people through queer-for-queer online spaces. Duggan's (2003) foundational work *The Twilight of Equality* argued that at the turn of the twenty-first century queer people, politics, and capitalism morphed into a formation she named "homonormativity."²

Homonormativity marks a double-move where dominant social norms attempt to relegate all aspects of queer life to the private sphere while coopting the language of queer public politics like equality, freedom, and privacy to secure the positions of bigotry and corporate culture (pp. 65–66). Although social norms peddle heteronormative ideals, consumerism, and labor relations that constantly encroach on the distinctions between work and life, I argue homoconnectivity, not homonormativity, is the dominant figuration of capitalism's force in queer lives online. Homoconnectivity plays with the elasticity of Duggan's homonormativity in two ways: twisting her focus on social norms to better account for queer life online; and tugging on the queer threads otherwise missing in contemporary, class-based arguments about privacy and user data. I discuss each of these moves in turn.

Pickled by Italian autonomist Marxisms (Hardt & Negri, 2017; Srnicek, 2016; Terranova, 2000), homoconnectivity highlights how online spaces are key sites that mark a turn in capitalism's techniques of power and locations of queer resistance. Scholars have debated how online users' interactions function, if at all, in broader systems of commodification and exploitation (Andrejevic, 2013; Barbrook, 1998; Hesmondhalgh, 2010; Terranova, 2000). When considering for-profit online spaces like Grindr, I am drawn to the explanatory power of Hardt and Negri's (2017) understanding of capitalism as extraction. As opposed to treating people as bamboozled dupes tricked into exploitation, Hardt and Negri highlighted how capitalism constantly reinvents itself to more efficiently privatize and control living labor, humankind's collective generativity. Capitalism evolves to more efficiently clutch onto the slipperiness of living labor with tactics like colonial conquest, the gathering of surplus value in regimented labor time, and privatizing common cultural production (Hardt & Negri, 2017, p. 193).

Increases in computational power have rapidly improved companies' means of capture and their ubiquity (Pfister & Yang, 2018, p. 36), necessitating a conceptual innovation from normativity to connectivity. Homoconnectivity centers how technological developments intensify capitalism's reach and ability to leech queer online social production—our knowledges, relationships, cultures, spaces, potentialities, and, most importantly, data. This shift in attention becomes clearer when comparing previous research on Grindr with this article's analysis. If I were to unpack Grindr's homonormativity, I might note how users' profiles frame good gay bodies as sporty and muscular (Enguix & Gómez-Narváez,

2018; Miller, 2018) and produce racist, hegemonically masculine affects (Jaspal, 2017; Penney, 2014). In contrast, I am concerned with how Grindr enacts power not through messages about queerness but by constituting a complex, extractive queer space in the first place. I provisionally identify four such homoconnective techniques by which queer social production is cultivated, collected, and transformed: shaping the affective and attentional economies of users towards for-profit technologies; externalizing sites, performances, and communication of queer desires; quantifying, financializing, and sharing users' activities; and selling back to users the experience of immediacy, intimacy, and (stranger) sociability often constitutive of queerness and queer spaces. Mapping these tactics extends the fruitful work of previous scholars who have questioned the effects of (online) consumerism on queer communities (Campbell, 2005; Cassidy, 2018; Duggan, 2003; Mowlabocus, 2010). By equipping queer communities with an orientation to homoconnectivity, we can better account for and disrupt the ways technologies, boosted by a mutation from consumerism to extractivism, privatize and monetize aspects of queer lives.

As opposed to class-based critiques of the asymmetry in online privacy (Fuchs, 2012), homoconnectivity marks the risks placed on queer end-users as a class-upon-themselves. As Duggan (2003) pointed out, privacy has been a keystone value in queer organizing in the United States, dating back to the homophile movement in the 1950s (p. 52). Homoconnectivity renews a politics of privacy that accounts for the specific effects datafication can have on queer people. Little about our lives is off-limits: "Demographic, economic, behavioral, health, religion, sexuality, and life event-based information are all routinely aggregated" (Crain, 2018, p. 90) online. Geolocative apps like Grindr afford increased mobility while leaving these crumbs of valuable data, allowing state actors and multinational corporations to surveil, harm, and entrap queer people financially and legally. For example, South Korea (Hancocks & Suk, 2017) and Egypt (Raghavan, 2017) are just two countries that have relied on Grindr to identify and jail queer individuals.

My concern does not stop at data gathering, though. Normative approaches to data frame information as a person's property improperly handled by a company, but datafication also entails "the ability to classify and sort people based on the available data—and thereby to create new insights and correlations between people, their activities, and interests" (Mai, 2016, p. 198). This produces an afterlife to data that requires

a reframing of privacy as a collective political problem since analysis and knowledge-production occur at the population, not the personal, level. Homoconnectivity flags the need for new ways to enact care and imagine queer spaces, politics, and privacy split from the profiting practices of data brokering and the weaponization of predictive analysis by apps like Grindr.

Datafication is rarely, if at all, possible without platforms. A platform is “a programable digital architecture designed to organize interactions between users—not just end users but also corporate entities and public bodies. It is geared toward the systematic collection, algorithmic processing, circulation, and monetization of user data” (van Dijck et al., 2018, p. 4). Platforms must negotiate the production and fulfillment of multiple wants and needs for their various users, leveraging the vast amount of intimate user data they collect to tap into otherwise distant desires (van Dijck, 2013, p. 12). Highest among these cravings is connectivity. In exchange for their time, attention, and social production, users taste moments of sociality that hide the underbelly “fueled by *data*, automated and organized through *algorithms* and *interfaces*, formalized through *ownership* relations driven by *business models*, and governed through *user agreements*” (van Dijck et al., 2018, p. 9, emphasis in the original). In pursuit of data, companies often attempt to “box in” users and nudge them toward platform chains of vertical integration, drifting from their original services toward other domains of online social life (van Dijck, 2013, p. 9).

Grindr is no exception. In 2016, the Chinese mobile gaming company Beijing Kunlun Tech purchased a 62% share in Grindr as part of its broader diversification strategy to cultivate products and services in markets outside China (Ge, 2017). Grindr is one platform in a suite of Kunlun Tech’s holdings, which include Chinese distribution rights to the mobile games Angry Birds, Clash of Clans, and Need for Speed, the Opera browser, numerous financial service firms, and two app stores with 20 million monthly users (Wang, 2016). After completely purchasing the company in 2017, Kunlun Tech granted access to Grindr users’ data to engineers in Beijing while migrating the app’s management away from the United States (Wang & O’Donnell, 2019). There is no evidence to date the Chinese government has misused the information, but this episode with Kunlun Tech affirms why we must pay attention to homoconnectivity and how queer data can be wielded by multinational corporations and state actors whose motivations might overlap by chance, choice, and force.

As I turn toward analyzing Grindr itself, I want to push against a tendency to view the relationship between platforms and users as dyadic. Nieborg and Helmond (2019) argued that a consumer–producer orientation to platforms misses their engagements with “*multisided markets* where platforms facilitate interactions between distinct ‘sides’ or ‘users’, which include end-users (i.e. consumers), businesses (e.g. content developers), advertisers, and others” (p. 201). Platforms and the relationships that structure their growth are complex and deserve equally complex descriptions beyond extractor and host. Grindr provides users access to the intimacies of queer sociality while convincing queer people to spend as much time as possible on the app, increasing data collection. Blending their new partner platform Directopub with its troves of user information, Grindr also sells advertising opportunities to companies with a precision that can “target specific regions, cities, postal codes and even certain lat[itude]-lon[gitude] radi[i]” (Directopub, 2018, p. 5). This sets the stage to break down how Grindr uses what I label techniques of continuity and constraints to both smooth and punctuate users’ experiences at the nexus of homoconnectivity and the app’s multisided market.

Power play: caught between Grindr’s continuity and constraint

Grindr exerts effort like many “interface designs [to] encourage us to see forgetfully” (Wysocki & Jasken, 2004, p. 30). Although networked dating apps like Grindr, Scruff, and Growlr have certainly increased queer individuals’ ability to locate and lust after each other, their opacity is concerning. Oscillating between Grindr’s built experiences and the possibilities it both affords and restricts, the remainder of this article problematizes Grindr’s interface, messaging system, advertising, and subscription model to bring forward its homoconnectivity (Figure 1, Grindr, n.d.). With an estimated 3.8 million daily users worldwide (Bucksense & Grindr, 2018), the sheer number of queer individuals’ perceptions being shaped by Grindr and the unaccounted-for vulnerabilities that come with data extraction make this analysis an important entry point to challenge the appification of queer lives.

Grindr contours and nibbles on its users’ social productivity, yet it must construct users’ experiences in a way that does not completely tip-off that they are a resource within the app’s multisided market. Taking

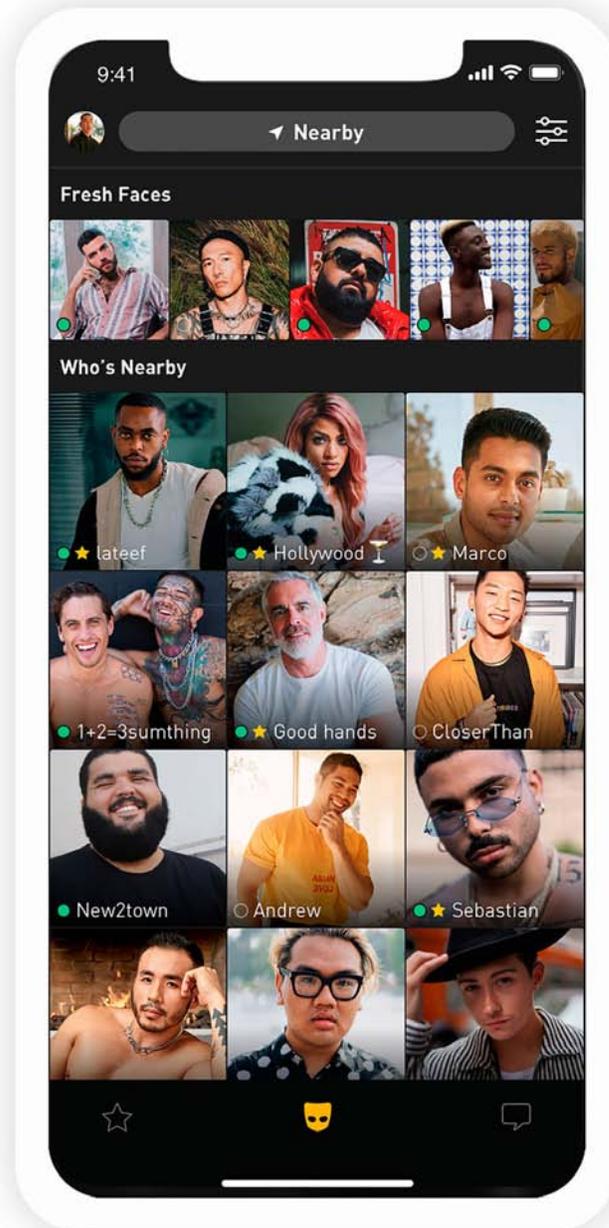


Figure 1. A mock-up of Grindr's interface on iPhone from Grindr's website.

homoconnectivity as a backdrop, I organize my criticism around two complementary techniques Grindr deploys to satisfy users while profiting from queer social production and potentialities: continuity and constraint. Continuity and constraint work together through interfaces, pulling users into an app where data is captured and pushing them toward

buying its paid version. Although these processes act in tandem on the app, I separate their movement for heuristic clarity—first dwelling on continuity and then constraint.

Continuity

Grindr participates in what Pfister and Yang (2018) call technoliberalism, an intensification in capitalism where apps “work to build new systems that can replace existing ways of doing things” (p. 254). A key way these systems intervene is by creating user experiences so seamless that people incorporate digital products into their daily performativities. Dating apps like Grindr privatize common spaces of queer stranger sociability like bars and coffee shops through their geolocative affordances. Collapsing the physical proximity between users, Grindr overcomes this limitation of previous queer spaces. This intensifies subscribers’ ease of access to queer spaces that are increasingly personalized and brimming with more chances to meet others. Reveling in the productive both-and of homoconnectivity, Grindr provides the space and the means for users to communicatively erect horniness, excitement, and attention between each other, only to then suck participants’ data and the (sexual) products of their communication. The resulting data are then massaged by programmers to change future iterations of the app, compose more specific advertisements to individual users, and coax people into continuing and even increasing their attentional investments in Grindr.

Grindr relies on three contemporaneous moves to create a sense of continuity for its users. First, Grindr’s interface quiets the otherwise intrusive reach of the app, giving it omnipresence. Grindr then funnels users into a self-centered orientation to queer space, encouraging them to fill in the perceptual blanks of its subtle designs with their own sense of agency. From this position, Grindr becomes a substitute for the bodies and potentialities of other people in its queer dating space, nudging users to touch their phones with the same flirtation as a potential mate. I discuss these overlapping communicative tactics in turn.

Rhetorical quieting

Grindr paradoxically makes itself loud and quieted, present and invisible to users who enter the platform. Although people download the

application onto their devices, create profiles, log in, and open it with every use, Grindr's presence is strategically unintrusive to avoid being annoying or clunky. It is not just Grindr users who calibrate the volume of their profiles and identities via rhetorical quieting (Smilges, 2019); Grindr itself possesses designed decrescendos to not interrupt the work—the valuable social production —of individuals. By getting out of subscribers' way, Grindr ushers people through its interface, conjuring the experience of choice, access, and freedom while creating the means for people to act upon their desires. Visually, Grindr quiets itself to position users as the locus of control over potential mates and the experience of queer space.

Navigating Grindr can be experientially boisterous—its interface stuffed with a cascading grid of user photos, pop-up ads, and red notifications dots—but how the app slyly moves to not be noticed is just as important as tracing how it renders the self and others salient. Grindr utilizes a black background throughout the application. This gives text in each tab the illusion of floating in otherwise unarticulated space. Furthering this unobtrusive orientation, simplistic icons like a star (for favorite profiles), the Grindr logo (main interface), and a speech bubble (messages) sit at the bottom of the screen, outlined in grey above the blackness. Placing these icons at the base of the app's rectangle frame, Grindr leans on Western habits of reading—from top to bottom, left to right— that draw people's eyes away from the navigation buttons and upward to the squares of profiles in the top right corner. Scrolling up and down the grid, pictures stack together horizontally and vertically to squeeze out any room for Grindr itself. The same happens when clicking into a nearby user's profile; their square photo transforms into a full screen image. When swiping to the left or right on a full screen profile, another individual's page swallows up the screen. Of course, Grindr is ultimately the portal by which these pictures exist, but the app's display minimizes the evidence of its labor to host profiles (and subsequently extract data) through equally minimalistic design.

Self-centeredness

Grindr's interface and geolocate protocol build an image of a queer world where the user is centered in queer space. Moving outward from a user's location like an explosion's blast radius, Grindr calculates the distance between individuals' phones. The app then loads an interface

individualized for each person who logs in, ordering other Grindr members from closest to farthest away. This refigures previous relational structures crafted in queer spaces. Instead of traveling to a designated spot, melting into a moment, and riding its spontaneity, people have access and controls to navigate these spaces as if they only exist for a themselves—because algorithmically, they do.

Behind this flow of profiles ordered on proximity lies a trap, a social two-way mirror. Grindr's circumference-driven distance measurements privilege user clustering. People who log into Grindr in cities and urban centers are flooded with profiles one to two miles away from their location. Tall buildings and multifamily housing, usually absent from rural and some suburban areas, add to the wash of profiles since Grindr does not include elevation when calculating proximity. Positioned on the outer rings of their individualized calculations, city members appear on rural users' interfaces, whereas those spread out by small town development and urban sprawl are lost in the gaps of the app's GPS protocols. In addition to composing a pervasive, self-centered visual representation of the queer community, Grindr's algorithm excludes the countryside and rural queer people from queer imaginaries by literally erasing their presence from Grindr's interface.

Bodily substitution

After quieting itself and fore-fronting users as the center of Grindr's queer space, the app intervenes in a flirtatious way, standing in for the body of a potential interlocutor. Grindr soaks up the energy of touch through its navigational gestures. Grindr (like mobile phones generally) inserts itself between two users' attempts to connect, so it can extract the physicality of sex, the erotics of intimate bodies, and the pleasures of mingling. To move throughout Grindr, subscribers simply flick their fingers upward, downward, or side-to-side. Like a curious digit tracing the outline of a mate's back or connecting the freckles on someone's skin, Grindr's interface invites people to tickle their screens. To enter a profile and subsequently message someone, individuals must press on a profile's picture with a singular finger like tapping someone on the shoulder to get their attention (and never mind the actual "Taps" users can send to each other to forcefully vibrate the body of a person they find worthy of extra affection). Temporally, Grindr situates users within a never-ending sexual "interstitial time"—a lingering,

sometimes alienating inbetweenness people fill with a constant surfing of the app (and waves of potential desire) while waiting for the next message, the next tickle, the next hump (Mowlabocus, 2016, para. 35). Even when Grindr is not open, the phone bulges in a user's pocket, humming like a personal massager with every single message. By utilizing touchscreens and tactile alerts, Grindr trains users to give the pleasure of touch, externalize the joys of connection, and crave vibrations and taps from the app under the guise they are really sent from another person's hand.

Such a substitutive logic that replaces people with phones edges into sketchy territory regarding consent. Users, without any distractions from a busy interface, enter Grindr with their senses attuned to the phones in their hands, the pictures on their screens, the desires percolating in their bodies, and the means to produce pleasures. However, the conflation of touchscreens with the bodies of other users is an intensification of sexual practice that opens the door to an assertive, one-sided force that overcomes the limits of consent between queer individuals. Grindr affords users more control over the uncertainty of attraction, flirtation, and sex present in both straight and queer spaces like bars and coffee shops. It invites users to diddle with the app to "facilitate... awareness of the self and other, while simultaneously providing an ongoing site of trust, security and comfort" (Mowlabocus, 2016, para. 8), an almost salty-sweet and extractive intimacy easier than in-person cruising. Blocking co-constitutive relationality with an always on, always available phone-body only further solidifies the individual-centered logics of the app, habituating the touching of others without consequence. Taken together, continuity is an individualized design choice by Grindr that keeps the app present at all times in users' lives, even standing in for their mate's bodies. This ensures both that Grindr has ample data to monetize and that users keep comfortably waiting for attention within the app's borders.

Constraints

Grindr maintains a fine balance between attracting members through its pleasurable continuity and constraining their in-app access to suckle delicious data off their social production. Although they seem oppositional, continuity and constraint work together to prompt persistent

app usage for both free and paying members. I characterize constraint through three movements. First, I discuss Grindr's profile structure and its effort to squeeze users' identities into sortable selves. I then analyze how Grindr pesters users through limitations and advertisements to promote in-app purchases. Finally, I unpack how these two forms—sortable selves and Grindr's pestering—encourage users to filter each other out, homogenizing individuals' experience of queer space.

Composing a sortable self

Grindr controls how users manage their impressions upon others. Users are given seven content areas with which to compose themselves: display name, "about me," stats, expectations, identity, sexual health, social links, and a profile picture. For example, display names must be less than 15 characters and profile descriptions less than 250. Digits indicating a person's age, weight, and height quantify the body, while dropdown menus listing body types, sexual positions, and ethnicities situate corporeal performances into tidy categories. Grindr users run into hard limits on their self-expression, driving them to be brief, direct, and evocative.

I acknowledge filling out profile information is standard practice across many dating platforms. However, a queer individual translating their experiences into a biological and social profile comes with dangers that Grindr places back on individuals. As Grindr made clear in April 2018, the company approaches users' profiles as completely public information. It had no qualms with sharing data on people's serostatuses and locations with partner businesses (Singer, 2018). Grindr does not hide that it uses these rich caches of information—like profiles, conversations, and screen time—to attract advertisers and further narrowcast the content discussed in the next section. As a consequence, these same identity markers also render individuals easily digestible by others, distilling attraction into numbers for quick consumption. These constraints train users to become and expect sortable selves that simplify attraction while Grindr quietly extracts and monetizes this information in the background.

Pestering for purchases

Although Grindr creates a self-centered experience for users that encourages intimacy with their phones, the app also interrupts its own

freeing orientation to frustrate people in hopes they will buy a subscription to Grindr Xtra. Grindr Xtra is a suite of extended services available for a monthly fee that relieve people from some limits the app places on users' experiences. For example, Grindr Xtra increases the number of profiles a person can see on their home screen. For US \$19.99 a month, \$39.99 for 3 months, or even \$99.99 a year, Grindr will get out of an individual's way and expand their vision of this queer space by sixfold. This focus on selling users a product resonates with the consumptive logics of neoliberalism, but it is still in the service of homoconnectivity. Grindr brilliantly convinces users to pay money toward their own monetization. Subscribers boost their pleasurable experience of its continuity and potentially escalate their amount of time and social production on the app, further adding to Grindr's troves of extracted data.

Advertisements, sold by Grindr to reach exactly niche audiences, similarly slow down a free user's ability to move within its interface—a speed trap of sorts that paying customers can avoid. In exchange for their time and attention, Grindr removes these obstructions from its otherwise smooth interface. Continuing with the above example, when a free member scrolls past the fixed 100 profiles Grindr populates on its home page, a photo of a shirtless twunk-in-training wearing a wide brim hat freezes a user's motion. "See 50 more profiles" reads the text covering his scruffy mouth; a bright yellow button sits horizontally across his collar bones: "Watch a video." After a 30-second, full-screen video advertisement, Grindr's wall of profiles refreshes like the letter tiles on *Wheel of Fortune*, increasing the platform's projection of queer space by 50 percent. Watch-to-play advertisements intervene all throughout a user's experience—such as clicking new profiles, viewing someone's photos, and using the app's city-wide search function. These ads pull users' eyeballs while pushing people toward paying for Grindr Xtra, profiting as long as people keep peeping.

Filtering

When brought together, Grindr's constraints on profiles and accessibility create problematic incentives for users to homogenize their experience of queer space. A person, free or paying, can only see a limited number of profiles on their home screen, making space scarce. Labeled "My Type," individuals can save a default combination of sorting parameters. In its free version, these includes age, the type of interaction a user is

looking for (e.g. friends, dates, and sex “right now”), and a tribe, a sub-community label like twinks, geeks, and daddies. Setting Grindr’s filter maximizes a user’s odds they will encounter mates they find attractive. Through naming this “My Type,” Grindr helps people rationalize these exclusions by drawing upon an essentialist discourse that a person’s sexual preferences are immutable. Filtering is just a logical, non-political expression of what someone is attracted to. What could otherwise be a heterophilic orientation to queer space and intimacies is disrupted by a reliance on filters to curate this experience into unchallenging congruence.

Filtering and its promotion of homophily highlights homoconnectivity’s intensification of queer space. Grindr replicates and metastasizes the consequences of “not [being] the right kind of queer” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 151). Homonormativity brings intersectional discrimination to the surface, but homoconnectivity foregrounds Grindr’s motivation to make users’ experiences as seamless, individualized, and homogenized as possible to then extract queer social production. This affirms instead of challenges ageist (and for paid members—racist, sizeist, femmepobic, etc.) exclusion as smart, profitable design. Ultimately, Grindr’s strategy to induce filtering by constraining users’ experiences congeals in people’s imaginations that queer space consists of selfish similarity, not difference.

Queer world-taking?

Grindr, a queer-for-queer dating and hookup app, profits from the social production of its users like their sexual desires, flirtations, mobility, hookups, and common culture. Homoconnectivity—which I have defined as an arrangement of power that profits from the extraction of social production and potentiality from queer communities through online spaces, social media, technologies, and/or software—keys critics and users into a new modality of rainbow capitalism beyond commodification. By constituting and controlling the means by which people relate to themselves, to other queer individuals, to potential (sexual) partners, to their phones, and to queer imaginaries, Grindr gathers and crunches data to then sell advertisements displayed to its users. Acknowledging this logic of extraction otherwise quieted on geolocate dating apps is important because Grindr and similar programs are used by millions of

queer people a day, especially those closeted, in rural areas, and looking for sober spaces.

What types of queer futures swirl within and beyond homoconnectivity? Grindr offers its own vision. In June 2019, the company unleashed its latest innovation: Grindr Unlimited. For US \$39.99 a month, users buy the ability to scroll an endless queue of profiles, see who has viewed their page, and know when another user is typing a reply: a homoconnective intensification that sells users surveillance, a connectivity that further “transforms public space into private space, thereby reducing the contact sport of cruising to a practice of networking” (Dean, 2009, p. 194). However, the machinery of Grindr Unlimited might be monkey-wrenched toward the end of queer world-making as opposed to practices of what I name queer world-taking.

The affordances undergirding homoconnectivity may provide opportunities for circuit reversals, a digital queer world-making with buzzing agency that zaps life into possibilities like the screens of technologies themselves. I envision this politics of digital queer world-making as a networked evocation of what Berlant and Warner (1998) narrated as a “space of entrances, exits, unsystematized lines of acquaintance, projected horizons, typifying examples, alternate routes, blockages, [and] incommensurate geographies” (p. 558). Networked technologies deserve our attention and engagement since they share with queer intimacies a common form of messy connectivity that need not relate “to domestic space, to kinship, to the couple form, to property, or to the nation” (Berlant & Warner, 1998, p. 558). In short, we can and must do better than Grindr and its politics of extractive queer world-taking. The need to identify and counter homoconnectivity—to dream, disclose, code, and enact new futures—by making common, queer worlds online could not be clearer.

Notes

1. I recognize the homo- in homoconnectivity may center same-sex forms of attraction. However, it cuts both ways. Homo-, in its connotations of sameness, emphasizes connectivity as a collective risk for queer communities that requires a new understanding of privacy as more than an individual’s property rights.
2. Duggan’s homonormativity plucks at definitional tensions. For example, it does not nod to 1990s vernacular usage in trans enclaves (Stryker, 2008) or robustly open intersectional futures (Aiello et al., 2013).

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