Tinder and Grindr: a digital sexual revolution

Heterosexual and male homosexual stereotypes in mobile dating apps

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Abstract

Tinder and Grindr are two popular location-based mobile dating apps aimed at the heterosexual and male homosexual communities, respectively. This research focuses on stereotypes in mobile dating apps and aims to answer the following research question: how normative assumptions about the heterosexual and male homosexual communities can be embedded in the affordances of Grindr and Tinder. Little research has focused on Grindr and Tinder as applications that include assumptions about their target community.

In order to explore stereotypes and prejudices linked to the communities built in the affordances of the apps, an affordance analysis has been applied, with a specific focus on affordances that might be specifically related to assumptions about those groups. It has been considered that the affordances are found in the context between the actor and the object, therefore, subject to the environment in which they are analyzed.

The following affordances have been analyzed in this thesis: authenticity and anonymity; proximity; immediacy; communication flow; locatability; community identification; accessibility, availability and portability; multimediality, little effort and playfulness; shallowness; legitimacy; homogenization.

The results show that assumptions linked to both communities may be re-enforced by some of the affordances that have been analyzed. Promiscuity, sexually driven relationships, hyper-sexualized and impersonal behavior, little diversity in the community, and high value on casual sex are stereotypes linked to the male homosexual community. Perpetuation of traditional gender-roles, romantic approach in dating leading to marriage, and narcissism are stereotypes associated with the heterosexual community.

Keywords: affordances, Grindr, heterosexual community, male homosexual community, mobile dating apps, normative assumptions, stereotypes, Tinder.

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Introduction

Mobile dating applications: Grindr and Tinder

Grindr and Tinder, alongside other dating apps, are gradually showing how the dating scenario is changing and adapting to new trends and tendencies of, in this case, the heterosexual and the male homosexual communities. They are the two most popular mobile dating apps considering the number of users logging in (Ward 2014).

Grindr is a mobile app used by gay men to find other nearby men for chatting, dates or sexual encounters (Brubaker et al. 2014). It was launched in 2009 and it has over 7 million users (Aunspach 2015) in 192 countries (Van de Wiele and Tong 2014) with up to 300,000 men logged into the app at any given time (Aunspach 2015). The app uses geographic data of logged individuals in order to generate a list of profiles near the user's physical presence (Aunspach 2015). The developers define it as "the largest and most popular all-male location-based social network" (Grindr 2015) meant to help users meet other men "on the go" and to put them "0 feet away" from each other (ibid.). They claim their goal is to provide the users with "a new kind of dating experience" (ibid.). Chase Aunspach highlights that the engagement of the app is evidenced by the users "logging in eight times a day for a cumulative total of two hours" (Aunspach 2015, 4).

Tinder is a location-based matchmaking mobile app that uses GPS coordinates to match its users with other people in a specific radius. It was launched in 2012 and has since reached over 10 million of daily users (Lapowsky 2014), making it a "massive and undeniable success" (Witt 2014). The app takes basic information from Facebook profiles (name, age, list of friends, liked Facebook pages) in order to provide a simple presentation layout of every user and lets them pick some pictures from Facebook for their profile pictures on Tinder. The users have the option to swipe left or right, which mean No and Yes, respectively. If two users like each other, they both swipe right, which results in a "match" and the app allows the users to start a conversation.

Grindr's target is the male homosexual community and Tinder's target is both heterosexual and homosexual communities[1].

Normative assumptions

The perception of every community is affected by certain assumptions and stereotypes. Male homosexuals tend to be perceived as promiscuous (Aunspach 2015; Freeman 2014) and, according to researchers like Kane Race, historically willing to bring sexual encounters to public spaces (Race 2015). Grindr's perception from media and public health literature has been, as the researcher Roderic Crook notes, characterized "as laughable, hyper-sexualized, or dangerous" (Crooks 2013 in Van de Wiele and Tong 2014, 620). Also, journalists like Cody Freeman believe that hook-up apps like Grindr perpetuate sex-based stereotypes like promiscuity, impersonal behavior, and sexually motivated

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[1] Some homosexual and bisexual users labeled Tinder as "heteronormative" (Dries 2013) and researchers and writers consider it to be an app mostly exclusively heterosexual (Jo Sales 2015; Greenfield 2013). The way this issue affects my research will be explained in the methodology.

conversations (Freeman 2014). The way these prejudices affect how the communities are perceived has manifested in studies where Grindr has been used as a tool to reach a target group for research on HIV prevention and risks for the gay community, as a place for sampling (Burrell et al. 2012; Goedel and Duncan 2015; Landovitz et al. 2013; Rice et al. 2012). Grindr researcher Aunspach highlights that these types of health studies reaffirm stereotypes of gay men as "sexual deviants or diseased" (Aunspach 2015, 6). He insists, though, on the importance of researching Grindr itself as it is a space of promiscuous mobility (ibid.). The researcher claims promiscuity as a prominent practice in the gay community and recalls that being promiscuous has been traditionally linked to gay lifestyles and HIV-positive individuals (Aunspach 2015, 53).

Aunspach attributes Grindr's success to a reaction to heteronormative and homonormative trends (Aunspach 2015, 11). Heteronormativity, as defined by Pennington and Knight, is an "uncritical assumption that heterosexuality is the established mode of sexual orientation" (Pennington and Knight 2011, 60) and that society should maintain and support it. They also add that heterosexism refers to the "taken-for-granted assumption that heterosexuality is the […] superior lifestyle or sexual orientation" (ibid.). Aunspach adds that, according to a heteronormative perspective, different-sex relationships consist of "first connections between strangers [that] are embowed with romantic (not just sexual) potential, becoming the spark to a progress narrative of flirtation, exclusivity, proposal, and marriage" (Aunspach 2015, 33) and opposing it to "radical sexual politics of gay liberation" (ibid.).

Homonormativity is the monopolization of marriage and monogamy in the gay community that appeared in reaction to associations of promiscuity and HIV-positive to the gay community (Aunspach 2015). Aunspach also highlights how, within the gay community, marriage was proposed as a way to "cure promiscuity and AIDS" (ibid, 53). For this reason, some authors claim, gay men turned to the Internet as a "non-threatening space" (Van de Wiele and Tong 2014, 619) to arrange "sex, intimacy and sexual community" (Race 2015, 508). Homosexual encounters have been historically considered "deviant" (Blackwell et al. 2014, 5), and were started in public spaces in a subtle way to avoid stigmatization (ibid.), as Blackwell et al. explored in their research. Aunspach's research aims to claim promiscuity as a way to normalize non-monogamous sexual expression and highlights the importance of mobile media in queer experiences, as queerness[2] has been mobile since its encounters passed the urban and entered the digital (ibid.).

After Grindr's success, its developers tried to export the model to a dating app aimed at the heterosexual community: Blendr. Gawker's Adrian Chen explained that Blendr's main problem is that it was being marketed primarily as "about making friends, not love" (Chen 2011). With this distinction and its "tamer tone" (ibid.), Chen argued, the developers tried to address the differences between the communities and the journalist Rebecca Greenfield believes they softened the tone to appeal to the heterosexual public (Greenfield 2011). Greenfield argues that its problem lies on its target, as it is a "larger, even more diverse community" and the range of its mission – friendship –is "overly broad" (ibid.). In 2012, however, Tinder was launched with the same mission as Blendr: meeting new people. For

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[2] Queerness is understood as "gayness or all that is non-heterosexual" (Aunspach 2015, 60).

this reason, much research has been focused on the reasons of this dating app's success (Finkel et al. 2012; Witt 2014).

All these assumptions about both communities present a series of challenges that need to be problematized. Among others, presuming that the homosexual community is not as diverse as the heterosexual one (Greenfield 2011) is a problematic generalization about the gay community. Also, assuming all heterosexuals pursue a progression of events in a relationship such as "flirtation, exclusivity, proposal, and marriage" (Aunspach 2015, 33) is a questionable statement about the heterosexual community.

Perceptions about heterosexual and male homosexual communities shape what is said about dating applications such as Tinder and Grindr. However, I believe that these perceptions of the communities can be found in the apps themselves. To illustrate this, I will take a look at connotations suggested by Grindr and Tinder's names and logos.

A grinder, root of Grindr, is a "machine used for grinding something" (Oxford Dictionary 2015). To grind is to "reduce something into small particles or powder by crushing it", rub or cause to rub together gratingly and "a dancer's erotic gyration of the hips" (Oxford Dictionary 2015). When asked, Grindr's CEO Joel Simkhai explained that the word Grindr came from a coffee grinder, as a representation of "mixing people up together, a bit of a social stew" (Salerno 2011). He further stated that they were looking for a very "masculine" word and sound, but not necessarily "about being gay" (ibid.). Nevertheless, "grinding" is a slang term for two people rubbing their genitals against each other (Urban Dictionary 2015), leaving the app with clearly sexual connotations.

As for the logo, Simkhai said they wanted to focus on the notion of "meeting people" as a "basic human need to relax and socialize" (Salerno 2011) and explained it with an anecdote: "I went back to primitive tribal arts in Africa and Polynesia. One of the things I saw was these primal masks. It brings us back to basics, primal needs" (ibid.), and he claims that "socialization is the basis of humanity" (Salerno 2011). However, the symbol of a mask can also be understood in terms of anonymity. This relates to traditional spaces where homosexual men arranged their encounters before the appearance of digital spaces such as Grindr, when anonymity was paramount, as described by Race (2015). The mask can also be related to whips, chains and other BDSM practices. These considerations are immediately linked to promiscuity, which, according to Aunspach, is associated with the homosexual community (Aunspach 2015) (Fig 1.).

Figure 1. Grindr logo (Grindr 2015)

Tinder, on the other hand, means "dry, flammable material, such as wood or paper, used for lighting a fire" (Oxford Dictionary 2015). This definition is symbolized in the logo of the

company, a flame, related to lighting fire and the idea of a romantic spark between the two matched people (Fig. 2), a circumstance that, according to Aunspach, is related to heterosexual relationships (Aunspach 2015, 33). The researcher Carolyn VanderMolen conducted a study where she sought an association between flirting styles and sexual orientation (VanderMolen 2013). Her results assumed that heterosexual individuals tend to prefer a traditional approach when it comes to dating, where traditional gender-specific roles are maintained (ibid.). In other words, "it's the man's job to initiate verbal contact and the woman's job to follow the leader" (ibid, 278). VanderMolen's statement, as well as Aunspach's assumption about heterosexuals having only romantically-driven relationships, might be connected to Tinder's name and logo, for what they both symbolize: romantic outcomes (Fig. 3).

What authors and researchers assume about heterosexuals and male homosexuals is always problematic, as it might have an effect on how they are perceived. Also, these authors' point of view is affected by the fact that they belong to a certain community and are influenced by their own experiences and subjectivities. Mainly, assumptions and stereotypes of male homosexuals are related to sexually-driven and dangerous behaviors, promiscuity, and generalization of personalities. On the other hand, heterosexuals are assumed to seek for romance and monogamous relationships that will eventually end up in marriage, as well as maintaining a traditional approach as far as initiation of relationships are concerned.

Figure 2 and 3. Tinder flame
and logo (Tinder 2015)

Therefore, this research aims to answer the following research question: "How are normative assumptions about heterosexual and male homosexual communities embedded in the affordances of Tinder and Grindr?". In order to answer this question, the notion of affordance will be addressed through literature in this issue. With a clear approach in mind, I will be able to research the affordances of Tinder and Grindr. However, my point of view is problematic in the sense that I am part of one of the target communities of these apps. This matter will be further addressed in the methodology.

The success of Tinder and Grindr has led many researchers to focus on uses and gratifications of these apps, taking into account user's perspective and experiences (Van de Wiele and Tong 2014; James 2015). Grindr has also been part of research regarding self-presentation from users on the app (Blackwell et al. 2014) and as being one of the location-based apps that fosters satellite dating (Quiroz 2013). Tinder has been part of an analysis of Facebook's privacy settings (Dreijer and van den Haak 2014). Artists are also centering their attention on dating apps and question the changing nature of love arguing that the emergence of dating apps are materializing a "new sexual revolution" (Verhoeven 2015), a "no strings attached date without leaving our home" (ibid.). Research from these

perspectives is interesting but they lack an analysis of mobile dating apps that includes the connotations and stereotypes of the communities they are aimed at. This thesis will allow me to make an argument about Tinder and Grindr's "technological potentials and restrictions of actions" (Raudaskoski 2009, 25), and explore the assumptions that might be connected to their target community.

A comparison between these two apps will allow me to understand their affordances in a more suitable way, as they focus on different communities and the particularities of one community will be better understood by comparing one with the other. Previous research on Grindr and its affordances will help me identify the affordances of Tinder.

Theory

In this chapter I will introduce the phenomenon of online dating and dating apps and their effects in the heterosexual and male homosexual communities. Previous work from different authors and scholars will help me outline the benefits of online dating and dating apps as well as already highlighting certain affordances that I will be looking at throughout the analysis.

Much psychological research has been done looking at online daters' profiles, the main reasons users visit online dating sites and the different types of personality attached to their frequency of visits (Valkenburg and Peter 2007). Online dating success has been researched in terms of long term relationships and negative experiences – such as finding users who seriously misrepresented themselves in their profiles or being contacted by someone in a way that made them feel harassed or uncomfortable (Smith and Duggan 2013) – in both online dating sites and dating apps (ibid.).

Some studies highlight the importance of online dating, claiming that nearly 70% of same-sex couples met online (Blackwell et al. 2014), and accentuating how "location-based real-time dating apps" ease local, immediate social or sexual encounters (ibid.), as well as, in the case of the male homosexual community, giving traditionally hidden sexual encounters a digital materiality (Race 2015, 503). Race implies that this new materialization no longer needs "prolonged verbal communication […] prior to sex" and includes an already defined specification of identities and desires from the users (ibid, 503). Aunspach considers that Grindr's engaging role in the gay community is based on materialization of sexual encounters, its construction of gay space and how the app is designed (Aunspach 2015). He relates the app's success to the fact that, for the first time, gay individuals can access gay space "instantaneously and privately" (Aunspach 2015, 7).

On the other hand, 20% of heterosexual couples have met online (Martin 2013) which reflects the difference between heterosexuals and homosexuals in terms of the space they use to meet other members of their communities. The value of online spaces varies depending on the community.

According to Finkel et. al., the success of Tinder and Grindr – as well as other dating sites –, is related to the increase of resources for finding a romantic partner and Internet accessibility, which has allowed relationship seekers to access a wider range of potential partners who would have been unknown or inaccessible in former times. Current dating sites suggest that, with "millions of users, science, and math" (Finkel et al. 2012, 4), they can provide with a higher rate of success compared to face-to-face or conventional means for finding a partner (ibid.).

Finkel et al. approached the differences between online and offline dating from a psychological approach in order to determine if they were fundamentally different and if online dating promoted better romantic outcomes than conventional, offline, dating (Finkel et al. 2012). Though the outcomes of their research will not be of interest for the purpose of this thesis, the researchers consider three major services provided by online

dating sites – access, communication and matching –, which I use for my affordance analysis and will be described below according to their definition.

Access refers to users' opportunity to reach potential romantic partners that they would not be able to find in a conventional, offline, situation (Finkel et al. 2012, 6). Blackwell et al. believe that dating websites differ from dating apps as they focus on meeting people in a general area and require weeks or months of online communication before an actual date (Blackwell et al. 2014, 2). They also emphasize that LBRTD (location-based real-time dating) apps have been of great importance for men who have sex with men (MSM) in terms of creating new spaces for community building (ibid.). That is, accessibility and immediacy seem to be significant for users from both communities.

Communication considers the various forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC) that users are provided with for engaging with potential partners before meeting face-to-face (Finkel et al. 2012, 6). Race also considers chat mechanisms as a "controlled and potentially anonymized disclosure prior to any sexual encounter" (Race 2015, 503). It establishes a new medium of conversational exchange among strangers with appealing potential (ibid.). Consequently, and according to Race's perspective, anonymity appears to be essential for the gay community, as well as communication. The latter is also important for heterosexuals.

Matching refers to a mathematical algorithm that chooses potential partners for users (Finkel et al. 2012, 6). Traditional "matching" refers to a percentage that shows the compatibility between two users in traditional online dating sites. In certain ways, Tinder and Grindr use the opposite of what the authors describe: "a random selection of potential partners with whom the user will be especially likely to experience positive romantic outcomes" (ibid.), because the selection is not random – it is based on proximity – but it is not based on "self-reports or other types of individual-difference measures" (Finkel et al. 2012, 6). The algorithm that Tinder uses for "matching" is proximity – by using the location-based affordance of the app – and shared interested based on Facebook profiles, pointing out tastes and possible conversational topics to ease computer-mediated communication (CMC) between users (Finkel et al. 2012). On Grindr, "matching" is exemplified by the GPS location as well as the characteristics users specify they look for in other users. However, researchers like Kane Race argue that in the gay community, unlike in the heterosexual market, no complex algorithm is needed to constitute personal compatibility. Rather it depends on the "statistical power of sexual frequency" (Race 2015, 501), referring to the amount of casual sex partners that one needs to have in order to find a romantic match. This assumption about the gay community will be problematized during the analysis of this research, as Race belongs to this community and it affects how it is perceived by him.

Race has also focused on Grindr's media approach, arguing that "online hook-up devices" (Race 2015, 496) afford new ways of arranging sexual encounters, intimacy and sexual community (ibid.). Nevertheless, according to Race, "hooking up" is not the only reason why gay men are using these devices, as they also allow "checking in" (ibid, 498). He claims it is key to the depiction of "an erotically-invested gay identity" (ibid, 498) while bringing the traditional online browsing and random chat to a form of "everyday distraction, personal validation, and social recognition" (ibid, 498). The pattern is also

mentioned by Aunspach as "checking cycles" (Aunspach, 2015, 5), a habit of constantly refreshing a profile to see "who may be gay around me" (ibid, 5). Nevertheless, heterosexuals might also "check in" to see who is available. Taking Aunspach's acknowledgement –"who may be gay around me" (Aunspach 2015, 5) – heterosexuals would look for: who may be single or available around me. This behavior is mainly fostered by GPS location.

Affordances

This thesis explores normative assumptions of the communities built in the affordances of Grindr and Tinder. In order to answer my research question, as I explained in the introduction, I need to examine the notion of affordances.

The perceptual psychologist Jerome Gibson coined the term affordance. He states that the world is perceived not only in terms of its object shapes and relationships but also in terms of what it provides, its possibilities: its affordances (Gibson 1979, 120). He argues that actions are made possible by a specific agent in a specific environment, the relationships of which he calls affordances. They are clues in the environment that indicate possibilities for action (ibid.). Researcher Sanna Raudaskoski claimed affordances are neither in the object nor the actor, but in the environment (Raudaskoski 2009, 31).

In this research, I will focus on the notion of affordances that claims they are constructed according to representations of actors involved; they lie between the actors and the objects. I believe heterosexual and homosexual communities are in the apps' environment, and, therefore, I will read the affordances from the perspective of a user who is part of one of those communities, because, as Gibson stated, affordances are inevitably influenced by representations of the agents involved (Gibson 1979, 120).

In this sense, my definition will be narrowed by Donald A. Norman's contribution on "perceived affordances" (Norman 1999a, 39). He distinguishes between "real affordances" and "perceived affordances" and highlights that the latter ones may be more important for designers in terms of valuation by the users (ibid.). Norman aims to differentiate "action potentials" (Norman 1999b, 123) from the potentials that users will perceive. Moreover, media researcher Andrew Richard Schrock states that affordances are affected by social norms and learned understandings. This is useful in terms of how perception of affordances depend on the community that a user belongs to. In other words, assumptions about the apps' target community will determine the users' perception.

Since I aim to analyze mobile dating apps, Schrock's work is also useful, as he mentions relevant communicative affordances defined as "an interaction between subjective perceptions of utility and objective qualities of the technology that alter communicative practices or habits" (Schrock 2015, 1232), which is of particular importance for this research as I aim to investigate whether general assumptions – or 'subjective perceptions' – can be found in the affordances – or 'objective qualities of the technology' – of the apps.

In his research, Schrock proposes a set of four communicative affordances of mobile media: "portability, availability, locatability, and multimediality" (Schrock 2015, 1230) that I will describe as they will be useful in my affordance analysis on Grindr and Tinder.

- **Portability** allows the user to move and to integrate the device in a variety of social contexts (Schrock 2015, 1236). Carolyn Marvin also refers to this affordance when describing "deep connectivity" emerging from mobile communication, as it "amplifies the scale, volume and fluidity of digital activity" (Marvin 2013, 155). It is also one of Dries Verhoeven's topics during the artist's social experiment: "Does the self-exposure stand in the way of deeper contact or does the new love technology enable us to get closer together more quickly?" (Verhoeven 2015). A deeper connectivity, fluidity of digital activity and mobility may be related to how communities shape relationships between individuals;

- **Availability** refers to the possibility of direct connections and more frequent interactions (Schrock 2015, 1236). This affordance links to Finkel et al.'s definition of "access" as an opportunity to increase one's choices in terms of meeting people (Finkel et al. 2012, 6), and to Marvin's "asymmetric transparency" as it conveniently allows strangers to be easily connected but it also permits surveillance (Marvin 2013, 156).

- **Locatability** is afforded by a GPS connection. It enables different forms of communication that were not possible before its implementation (Schrock 2015, 1237). Race argues that the primary means of meeting people is location based searching (2015, 501). Aunspach also highlights the importance of GPS data for defining Grindr as it allows "detailed, user-specific navigation and control of the space created by Grindr itself" (Aunspach 2015, 30). Other researchers claim that location-based real-time dating (LBRTD) apps facilitate local, immediate social or sexual encounters (Blackwell et al. 2014, 2). I consider GPS location a significant affordance that can be found in both mobile dating apps and that shape how their target community is perceived.

- **Multimediality** combines different media in a single device (Schrock 2015, 1238). Schrock concludes that "perceptions of the utility of particular technologies are affected by experimentation, social norms, and learned understandings" (ibid., 1238), referring to how the two target communities use dating apps. Marvin also identifies the advantages and drawbacks of multimediality when referring to "expanded legibilities" that are now available through social media, such as geo-tracking, mobile video and facial recognition (Marvin 2013, 156).

Kane Race and Chase Aunspach's work will be useful because their research focuses on affordances on Grindr. Race highlights Gibson's argumentation that "the affordances of an object depend on the predispositions and goals of the creature encountering it" (Race 2015, 500). He contemplates online hook-up devices not as "inert vessels or pathways for the same old meanings and interactions, [but as] merely reproducing pre-existent characteristics of sexual cultures and practices" (Race 2015, 503). In other words, he believes that Grindr depict the assumptions that the author suppose from the male homosexual community.

Meanwhile, Aunspach describes five affordances of Grindr that he believes strengthen promiscuity – a stereotype that he links to the gay community –: vulnerability, eroticism,

queerness, morals and messiness. He believes that using Grindr, "possibilities for interaction, ecstasy, promiscuity, and the reconfiguration of heteronormative space are forged" (Aunspach 2015, 10). As previously mentioned, he assumes that promiscuity is a trait of the homosexual community based on the work of other authors such as Douglas Crimp, where he reclaims promiscuity and argues that it was born because of the gay community exploring "pleasures outside of procreative intercourse" (Crimp 1987 in Aunspach 2015, 53) as well as claiming that heterosexual couples will "have a much harder time learning 'how to have sex in an epidemic' than we did" (ibid, 53). His implication is that heterosexual people do not experience sexual encounters in the same way as homosexuals.

As for the affordances that Aunspach describes in his work, I believe they are problematic as they are too vague and assume certain behaviors and characteristics of the male homosexual community. For this reason, I will not be using them in my analysis.

Methodology

For the purpose of this research, the methodology that best accommodates my thesis is an affordance analysis of Grindr and Tinder. As I am interested in assumptions and they are related to behavior, I will look for behavioral affordances in the apps and especially those that shape how the heterosexual and male homosexual communities are perceived, what stereotypes are embedded in them.

Grindr clearly focuses on the male homosexual community, while Tinder focuses on both heterosexual and homosexual. However, I will focus my research on the heterosexual community when referring to Tinder because writers and users have described it as "heteronormative" (Dries 2013) and very much centered on heterosexuals (Jo Sales 2015; Greenfield 2013).

This thesis focuses on affordances as described by Gibson – clues in the environment that indicate possibilities for action (Gibson 1979) – but understanding that they are found in the context, between the actors and the objects. Norman's perspective is also useful in terms of focusing on perceived affordances (Norman 1999b), as well as Schrock's contribution as he highlights how affordances' perception is affected by learned understandings (Schrock 2015). Finally, I will use Finkel et al. and Schrock's work as a reference and a basis to help me identify further affordances.

The affordances I will be looking at during this research are: authenticity and anonymity; proximity; immediacy; communication flow; locatability; community identification; accessibility, availability and portability; multimediality, little effort and playfulness; shallowness; legitimacy; homogenization.

This affordances will be critically analyzed in order to see if they reinforce assumptions or stereotypes about heterosexual and male homosexual communities. I have pointed out implications about these communities throughout the previous sections of this research in order to answer my research question.

Race and Aunspach's work will be very valuable for this research, as I previously explained, but they are problematic as some of the claims they make are based on stereotypes of the gay community, to which both belong to. Their arguments and point of views might be affected by this circumstance, as well as it will affect my analysis, as I belong to the heterosexual community. Therefore, and considering that the affordances are in the context, this could pose potential problems in the analysis.

Affordance analysis

In this section I will apply an analytical approach to identify the affordances of Grindr and Tinder and determine what they mean and how they relate to former studies on communicative and digital affordances. Also, I aim to recognize normative assumptions embedded in the affordances of the apps in order to answer the research question posed in this thesis.

Next, I will list and explain the affordances that I have identified on Grindr and Tinder and I will examine the relationship they have with assumptions that have been made about the heterosexual and male homosexual community.

Authenticity and anonymity

On Tinder, users are able to create a Tinder profile online by connecting it to their Facebook account, which uses their first name, age, page likes, friends list and four pre-selected pictures from Facebook. They can fill in an optional 240-character bio and the pictures can be changed, but need to have been previously uploaded to Facebook. Researcher Jessica Jones believes that, by linking Tinder to a user's Facebook account, people become verified and it mitigates the chances of viewing fake profiles (James 2015, 14). Also, since profiles are automatically created from a previous existing profile, there is no need for a username or pseudonym, so the experience appears more "genuine" (ibid, 14). These characteristics and the fact that the app advertises itself as being like "Real life, but better" (Tinder 2015) afford authenticity. When a potential match is tapped on the screen, the app shows an extended profile, which includes the following: maximum six pictures, a short bio, common friends or connections on Facebook, shared interests based on liked pages on Facebook, and their Instagram account (Fig. 4 and 5). These connections between users also afford authenticity as a way of validating the other users and creating a true relationship, as James already claimed. Tinder recently added a "moments" feature consisting of "swipe-able photos" (Tinder Blog 2015) that a user can share with all of their matches at once. They can also be swiped "like" or "nope", just like with potential matches. Tinder explains that this new feature relates to real life in the sense that "the moments we experience start to fade", and, for this reason, "every shared Tinder Moment can only be seen for 24 hours" (Tinder Blog 2015). Thus, a sense of credibility is created, as it gets the users closer and lets them know more about each other.
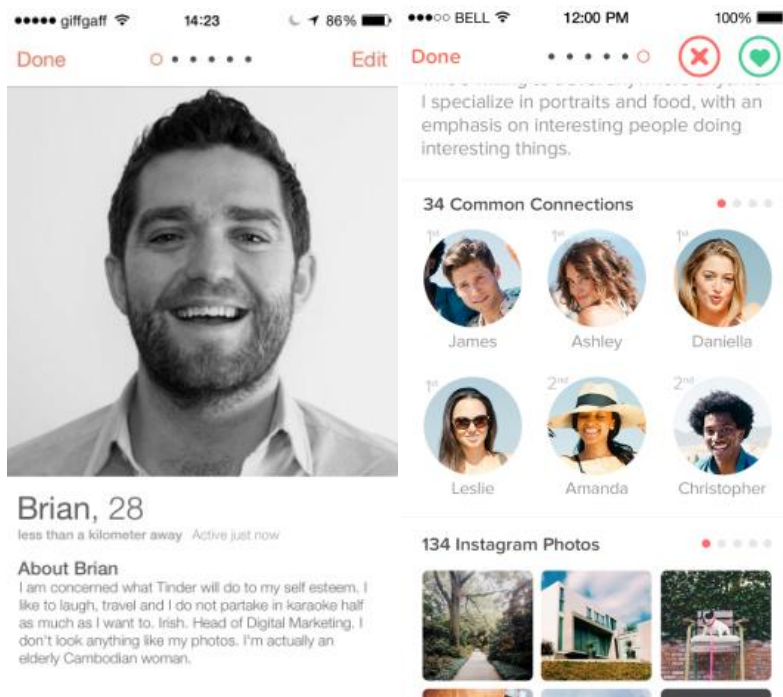
Figures 4 and 5. Extended profile, common connections and Instagram Photos (CHC Digital 2015 and Tinder 2015)

As for Grindr, when opening an account, users are only asked to create a username or nickname and no verification is needed. Moreover, users can have a profile with minimum information: a single picture along with optional information such as age, height, weight, ethnicity and the user's selection of what they are looking for, chosen from a list provided by the system (Brubaker et al. 2014, 4), and the possibility of hiding their age and not using a profile picture. In this way, Grindr affords anonymity to its users. As it has been described by Aunspach and Race, the connotations of being anonymous also relate to the oppression and need for the gay community to hide in the past (Aunspach 2015, 11; Race 2015, 502). Anonymity as an affordance is also reflected in the choice of the app's logo, a mask.

Some researchers like VanderMolen go so far as to claim that there is evidence that states that male homosexuals tend to be less concerned with the age of their partner and value sexual encounters more than long-term relationships, as, for them, procreation is not as important (VanderMolen 2013, 279). This assumption perpetuates the stereotype of gay men only having sexually-driven relationships.

Proximity

Another affordance that can be found on Grindr and Tinder's interface is proximity. Grindr's interface shows a set of profiles based on the user's GPS location. The main page of Grindr is a vertically scrolling screen that shows a three-wide list of square boxes displaying individual profiles (Fig. 6). The user's profile is the square at the top left-hand corner and the profiles shown at the top are physically nearest to the user (Aunspach 2015, 4). This grid is very physical, in the sense that it mimics real life: the user is on the grid and other users are placed around him in order of proximity. Aunspach relates it to online shopping spaces, like Amazon, where there is a process of going from the general to the specific (Aunspach 2015, 28). "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" (ibid, 28). Grindr's slogan claims "Find gay, bi, curious guys for free near you", emphasizing the "nearness" (de Lange 2009, 1) between the users and the requisite of proximity. Michiel de Lange, who researches co-presence in media, argues that media have changed from being based only on corporeal nearness to being complemented by virtual nearness (de Lange 2009, 14), the latter being what Grindr and Tinder provide.

Figure 6. Profile cascade on the main screen (Grindr 2015)

Grindr only shows the nearest 100 profiles to the non-paying users, encouraging potential customers to purchase "Grindr Xtra", a subscription that allows greater filtering options and 200 more men to be shown on the home screen (Aunspach 2015, 5). This subscription is continuously advertised, e.g. when non-paying users want to see profiles that are currently online, the screen states "Right here. Right now. See only guys who are currently online" (Grindr 2015) (Fig. 7). This characteristic affords proximity because of the terms used – place and time – and it seduces the user with the opportunity to view without being seen.
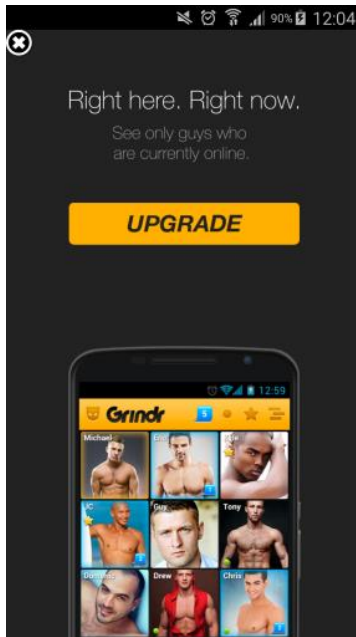
Figure 7. Non-paying users cannot filter by currently online profiles, so this screen encourages them to upgrade their version (Grindr 2015)

Aunspach emphasizes the role of touching on Grindr as he claims that using Grindr is a "sensual experience" (Aunspach 2015, 29). In order to see an extended profile, users are encouraged to tap one of the little squares of the grid with the profile picture. Also, if the user swipes up and down the screen, the profiles change according to proximity: scrolling up to the closest and down to the furthest. Aunspach links tapping on a profile with tapping on someone's shoulder and scrolling through profiles with feeling the skin of another (ibid.). According to the author, touch is built into Grindr to "erotically charge interaction within the application" (Aunspach 2015, 30), and echoes the bodily sensations users hope to experience at the end of a Grindr encounter. Being close and physical is a constant on Grindr, which brings us back to the physical and sexual implications of the name which was explained at the beginning of this research. It connotes a tangible relationship between users as well as sexual, perpetuating sexual connotations about the gay community. However, Aunspach's point of view on touching in Grindr as being sexual is vague as it could be applied to any app that works with a touch-screen.

That being said, touch is a significant feature in both apps and – even though Aunspach exclusively attributes it to the gay community –, it is also present on Tinder. Liking a profile can be done by tapping the green heart or by swiping right; rejecting a profile can be done by tapping the red cross or by swiping left (Fig. 8). When two users like each other, a screen with the text "It's a Match" appears and users are encouraged to chat with their match, "Keep playing" or "Tell your friends" (Fig. 9). Users are forced to tap or swipe every profile that is presented on their screen, as only one profile is shown at a time. However, for non-paying users, there is a "right swipe limiter" every 12 hours use, that, according to James, seeks to stop "indiscriminative narcissism" (James 2015, 16), where users would only swipe right – or like every profile – only to see who has already liked them back (James 2015, 16). Also, this feature exposes the importance of physicality and proximity, showing that, in this case, there is not a big difference between communities in terms of being close.

Figure 8 (left). Swipe right or tap the green heart to like a profile (Tinder 2015)

Figure 9 (right). Match screen (Tinder 2015)

However, limitation of nearby profiles and Tinder's limitation of swipes suggest a significant difference as to what is more important for their respective users. Grindr's format encourages users to see who is nearby – up to 100 profiles for non-paying users and up to 300 for "GrindrXtra" purchasers – while not forcing them to express an opinion about them. According to James, Tinder's limitation of swipes focuses on narcissists. My interpretation is that Grindr is limiting voyeurism for non-paying users while Tinder, as James stated, is limiting self-esteem boosts from users who might only be looking for physical approval.

Tinder users can customize their desired age, gender, and proximity of potential matches in the "preferences" section of the application. The interface shows the first picture of the profile, first name and age (Fig. 10). On Grindr, the possibilities are much broader: users can edit the type of men that appear on the main grid using filters that readjust the interface based on one's preferences. Non-paying users can filter by age and My Grindr Tribes – bear, clean-cut, daddy, discreet, geek, jock, leather, otter, poz (HIV-positive), rugged, trans, twink – to specify which tribe the user identifies with (Grindr 2015). The filters can be turned off at any time, and paying users are able to filter the profiles that are online at that exact moment.
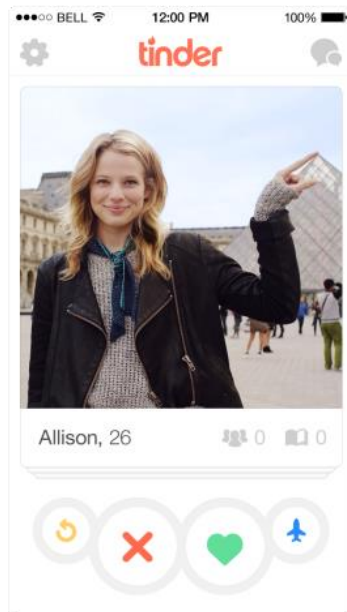
Figure 10. Tinder profile
(Tinder 2015)

A big difference between Tinder and Grindr is that Tinder allows the user to filter by distance their potential matches, showing profiles as far as 161 km away. Grindr only shows the closest profiles, regardless of distance. In this sense, the importance of the affordance of proximity on Grindr has a bigger role than on Tinder. Immediate proximity is also not as important on Tinder, as profiles closer than 1 km are not shown in meters, but are specified to be "1km or less" close. Also, knowing who is online at that moment is not crucial.

Extended profiles on Grindr show detailed information about other users: "weight, height, relationship status, ethnicity, body type, looking for – chat, dates, friends, networking, relationship, or right now" –, and My Grindr Tribes. The fact that a user can specify that he is looking for a user that would be willing to meet "Right now", affords proximity, and it can be linked to the premise that the male homosexual community is constantly looking for sexual encounters, as authors like VanderMolen and Race assumed to be stereotypical of the gay community. Race argues that online hook-up devices prioritize proximity over other determinations as the main reason for initiating contact (Race 2015, 501), highlighting the importance of proximity for the gay community.

Van de Wiele and Tong define Grindr as a "people nearby application" (PNA) which are designed to collect users' geographic location (Van de Wiele and Tong 2014, 619). The researchers describe the environments in which this app functions: physical and virtual. First, a personal profile builds an online presence; and secondly, location data shows physical presence (ibid.). A bridge between virtual and physical environments is created, translating online connections to offline interactions and only allowed by "the design and ubiquity of Grindr" (ibid., 620).

On Grindr, the bridge between physical and virtual environments is represented by the feature of "favorites". The app allows users to tag a specific profile as "favorite" without notifying the other user. If someone is marked as "favorite", the user will be able to see their profile even if they are not physically close to them. This is a way for the users to break the limitations of profiles seen in a grid. However, it affords proximity in a different

way, by allowing a user to feel close to another user that may be virtually close but may not be physically, reinforcing de Lange's notion of "nearness" (de Lange 2009). The stereotype of gays as voyeurs is re-enforced by this affordance because the feature allows users to have faster access to other users that are not immediately close, so that they can discretely view the profiles of others.

Paying users on Tinder have access to a feature that allows them to see profiles in a different city, breaking the proximity created by being able to look for potential matches nearby. On Grindr, any user can break the bridge between physical and virtual; on Tinder, users pay to do that. In this sense, I believe that there is a difference in accessibility to this feature, which reveals the assumption that, for the gay community, it needs to be easier to keep track of certain profiles.

Immediacy

Both Grindr and Tinder afford immediacy, though they do it in their own ways. At the bottom of every profile on Grindr (if the GPS is enabled), the user's distance is revealed along with an estimation of how long it will take one user to reach another user. It shows the approximate distance to where the other user is. According to figure 11, Francisco is 240 feet away from the user, at a 2 minutes walking distance (Fig. 11). This characteristic, so intimately related to proximity, also allows immediate contact with other users. Another feature closely linked to the accurate distance is the possibility for the user to specify that they are looking for users willing to meet "Right now" because, as explained when referring to proximity, it encourages the user to arrange an immediate meeting, which might be related to Race's statement about casual sex and not needing to exchange long conversation before arranging sexual encounters (Race 2015, 503).

When clicking on a profile[3], the user can see the other user's picture, name or username, age and distance (Fig. 11). A white circle in the middle of the screen encourages the user to access the chat screen and to start a conversation. If the user seeks for more information about the selected user, he needs to tap on the three block icon next to the user's name. In former versions, the white circle provided the user with extended information about the profile (Aunspach 2015, 4). Allowing faster access to the chat feature instead of the extended profile is a significant modification, as it suggests a change in perspective as to what should be easily accessible to users. In other words, immediacy is afforded because it encourages users to immediately initiate a conversation with the profile they tapped to – and, therefore, are supposedly attracted to. On the chat window, users can share their location with other users, which also allows possibilities for an immediate meeting.

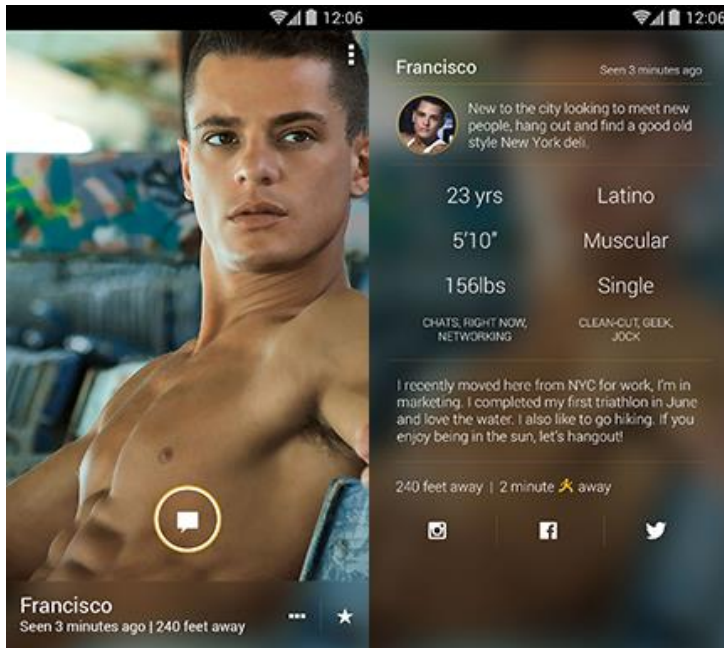[3] According to the latest version of Grindr available for Android: 2.3.3-2736 (Grindr 2015)

Figure 11. Grindr profile
(Grindr 2015)

Tinder, on the other hand, affords immediacy through the "It's a Match" screen (Fig. 9). The option "Send a message" encourages the user to start a conversation at that moment and forces the user to immediately focus their attention on the other user and their "matching" (Finkel et al. 2012, 6), provided by the app. Although the users can have hundred of conversations simultaneously, the interface forces them to express an opinion about every user chosen by the app as a potential match. As I already explained above, ignoring another user without manifesting a physical opinion about them is not possible on Tinder. Grindr's interface, meanwhile, provides users with an overview of the profiles that are currently around them.

Communication flow

Computer-mediated communication (Finkel et al. 2012, 6) or communication flow (Aunspach 2015, 32) is afforded by both apps, and is one of their most important affordances. Chat is basic because mobility implies continuous accessibility. On Grindr, users can chat with every profile that appears on their grid (Fig. 12 and 13).
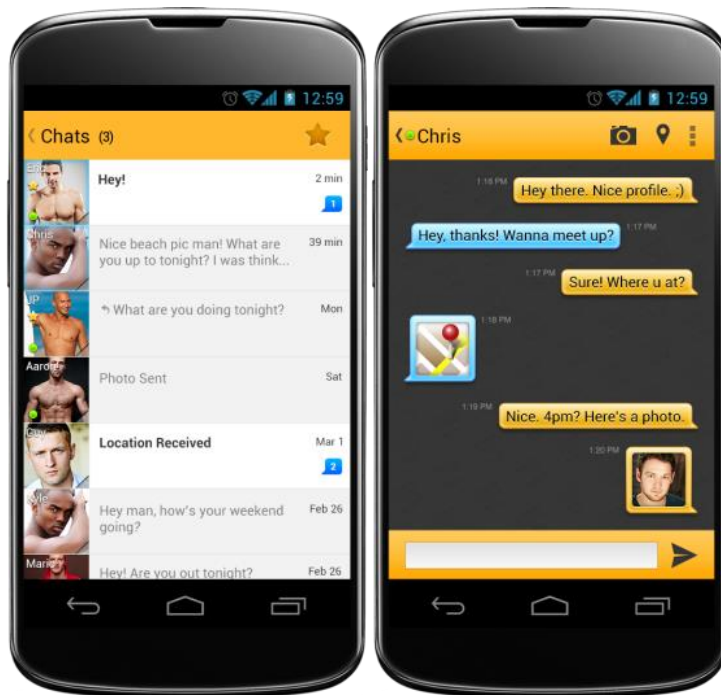
Figures 12 and 13. Chat function (Grindr 2015)

Chat allows the user to send a picture, share one's location, copy text from the conversation and use previously saved phrases to "chat easily" (Grindr 2015) with other users (Fig. 14). The "Saved Phrases" option is only available to Grindr paying users – GrindrXtra. This possibility aims to save users' time and ease communication between them. With the slogan "Saying hello just got easier", the app encourages users to start a conversation. While this may afford communication flow, it also problematizes the uniqueness and genuineness of the conversations. Moreover, Grindr's CEO explained that this feature might be "impersonal" but "efficient" (Park 2014). GrindrXtra reviewer Andrea Park thinks that this characteristic may cover phrases such as "how is your day going?" or "hot bod" (2014), assuming that physical and sexualized messages might be exchanged between users and supporting Freeman's statement about the existence of "impersonal behavior and sexually motivated conversations" (2014) between users on Grindr as a stereotype of the male homosexual community. However, the sample phrases given by Grindr (Fig. 15) and taken from their website do not include sexualized expressions, but refer to examples of immediacy instead – "What are you up to tonight?" – leading to early meetings. The chat screenshot used as an example by Grindr (Fig. 13) – where two users exchange a picture, location and arrange a meeting when a conversation has just started – might be related to what, according to VanderMolen, is expected of the gay community, valuing casual sex more than long-term relationships (VanderMolen 2013), because they are looking for immediate meetings nearby. Aunspach argues that dyadic conversations allowed by the app frame all queer relations as being between two people, impeding group sexual encounters (Aunspach 2015, 32), thereby also assuming that the goal of Grindr is to arrange sexual encounters, an assumption that Race makes as well (2015).
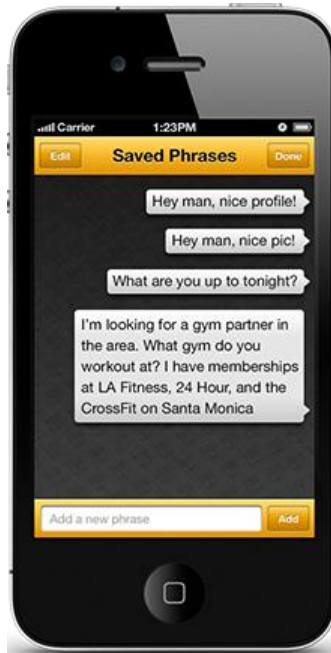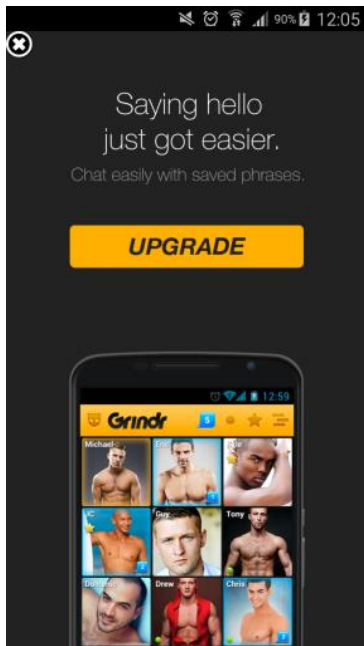
Figure 14. "Saved phrases" screen for non-paying users (Grindr 2015)

Figure 15. Example of "Saved phrases" (Grindr 2015)

Communication flow is also afforded on Grindr by the possibility of linking social networks to the profiles: Instagram, Facebook and/or Twitter account to their profile, so other users can have access to them (Fig. 11).

Tinder's chat screen is available in the menu at the top of the screen, where all the matches are shown, even if no conversation has been initiated (Fig. 15). Users are able to have hundreds of conversations simultaneously before deciding to meet with an individual face to face (James 2015, 14) (Fig. 16). This contrasts with the idea that, on Grindr, immediate meetings are a priority – exemplified in the "Right Now" profile option. Chat is, therefore, secondary. Grindr's example of a conversation between two users (Fig. 13) exemplifies what Race considered a characteristic of the gay community and hook-up apps, where it "no longer needs prolonged verbal communication prior to sex" (Race 2015, 503). The three dots at the top of the chat window also allow users to "unmatch", so their match disappears and the chat becomes unavailable.

The difference between chat function being prioritized on Tinder and being secondary on Grindr is also shown by the fact that, on Tinder, communication flow is afforded by common interests between users to ease conversations between them. However, the example of a conversation given by Tinder, and taken from their website, shows a conversation that also leads to an early meeting (Fig. 16). This debunks the assumption that the gay community is expected to arrange immediate meetings with other users through apps like Grindr.
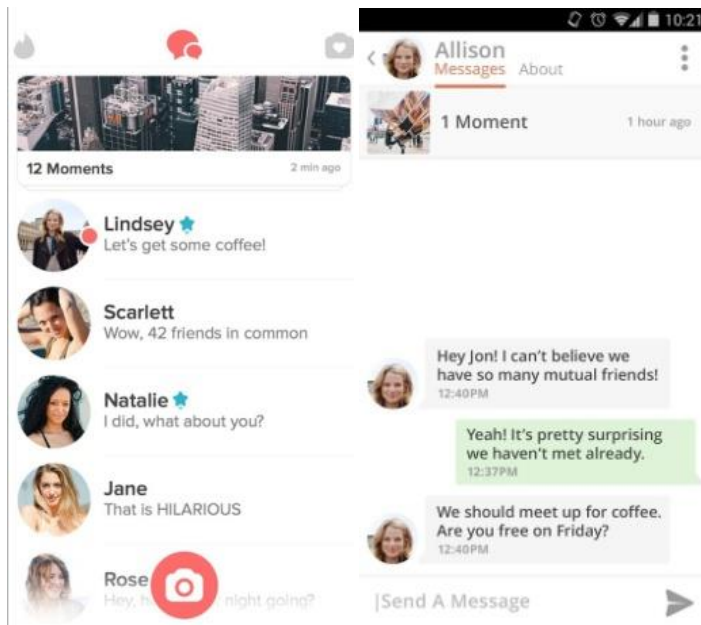
Figures 15 and 16. Chat screen (Tinder 2015)

Locatability

Grindr, as a PNA (people nearby application), works with users' GPS coordinates to look for users in a specific area (Van de Wiele and Tong 2014, 619). Tinder can also be placed in this category, as researchers have also highlighted the importance of including the GPS software so the users "can engage in real-time interaction relatively fast compared to PC-based online dating" (James 2015, 2). Van de Wiele and Tong also claimed that GPS location provides virtual and physical access and geographic and temporal immediacy between users (Van de Wiele and Tong 2014, 620), connecting it to the already explained affordance of immediacy.

In these terms, and according to Schrock's contribution on communicative affordances, locatability is afforded by Grindr and Tinder because they both work with GPS coordinates and the distance is very precise.

The distance between profiles on Tinder is displayed in km/miles, but, unlike Grindr, the closest distance will be 1mile/2km and the profiles are not shown in order of proximity (Fig. 4). Grindr profiles show the exact distance (Fig. 11) and users are also able to hide their location, which may indicate the importance of being invisible in some cases, such as being at a specific place and physically spotting someone who is 50 meters away according to the app.

Regarding Grindr, Aunspach claims that using GPS data from each phone "allows detailed, user-specific navigation and control of the space created by Grindr itself" (Aunspach 2015, 30) allowing the construction of a "portal of gay space in the pocket of every user" (ibid.). That is, it refers to the creation of a community, which will be further explained below. This creation of a gay space is what Race highlights when he refers to online hook-up apps like Grindr that give traditionally hidden encounters a materiality (Race 2015, 503).

Community identification

Community identification is afforded on Grindr by the possibility for users to identify with an existing community through the Grindr Tribes (Fig. 11). However, Aunspach argues that Grindr Tribes help with community and space building, though they can be ambiguous and can provide "in/visibility for marginalized identities on Grindr and gay communities at large" (Aunspach 2015, 39).

Nevertheless, according to Race, being part of the Grindr community is paramount, as it provides a space for gay men to arrange what Race calls a "sexual community" (Race 2015, 508). This assumes that the primary reason for gay people to meet is for sexual encounters. Blackwell et al. also agree with the importance of such apps for men who have sex with men (MSM) so as to create spaces for community building (Blackwell et al. 2014, 8).

Nevertheless, considering the interface of the apps, community identification on Tinder is not significant. According to Aunspach, it is important for male homosexuals to identify other male homosexuals around them (Aunspach 2015), and Grindr may be a tool to ease this identification.

Accessibility, availability and portability

Grindr and Tinder afford access (Finkel et al. 2012, 6) and availability to potential partners because they are mobile, increasing the fluidity of digital activity (Marvin 2013). They are also able to integrate it in a variety of social contexts, as explained by Schrock in his description of portability in mobile media (Schrock 2015, 1236).

According to Brubaker et al., Grindr's focus on profile images is an intentional design choice (Brubaker et al. 2014, 5). According to James, Tinder's design is photo-centric and simple (James 2015, 14) (Fig. 4 and 10). In these terms, accessibility on the apps is afforded by their simple and easy design.

However, accessibility on Grindr is also afforded by the previously explained distribution of the nearest hundred profiles on the grid in order of proximity (Fig. 6). On Tinder, profiles are only accessible while they are on the screen – and only one at a time – before the user decides whether they like the profile or not (Fig. 10). Additionally, matches can only be seen through the chat window. Extended profiles are more accessible on Tinder, because on Grindr the white circle that formerly led to the profile, now leads to the chat window, affording more accessibility to communication flow (Aunspach 2015, 32) than to reading more about the user.

Moreover, Tinder paying users have access to additional features that increase their accessibility, such as the possibility to rewind a left swipe – a rejected potential match – or to look for users in a different city. When users decide to not be visible to other users, they are also unable to see new profiles until the "discovery" feature is enabled again, thus restraining accessibility.

Finkel et al. highlighted how accessibility is important in the gay community as it creates new spaces for community building (2012, 6) and it is closely related to immediacy, in terms of arranging instant meetings with users nearby. In this sense, and having described

how the affordance is provided by both interfaces, it does not match an existing stereotype of neither of the two communities. Furthermore, it confirms Finkel et al. and Blackwell et al.'s contribution on access in dating apps (Finkel et al. 2012, 6; Blackwell et al. 2014, 2).

Multimediality, little effort and playfulness

Schrock argues that multimediality, or the combination of different media in a sole device, is affected by experimentation (Schrock 2015, 1238). Multimediality is afforded by the "moments" feature on Tinder – where users can share a picture with all of their matches at once – because it includes the exchange of pictures about situations that are theoretically taking place at that moment. It is also afforded by the possibility of sharing pictures or location on Grindr's chat window (Fig. 13). The inclusion of extra social networks in the apps (Instagram on Grindr and Tinder; and Facebook and Twitter on Grindr) is also part of this affordance.

Multimediality can also be identified in the fact that both apps focus on profile images. Grindr only shows one picture of every profile, encouraging users to ask for more pictures in the chat window and stimulating communication between them. According to Brubaker et al., Grindr's focus on profile images is an intentional design choice (Brubaker et al. 2014, 5). Tinder allows users to include more than one picture on their profiles, but they can only be seen when tapping to see through the extended profile.

Tinder has been accused of being more "a game than a tool for serious dating" (James 2015, 15), because its profiles are reminiscent of deck of cards, affording little effort from the user (ibid.). Some researchers claim that mobile dating, unlike traditional online dating, is designed to lead to a meeting (ibid, 16) and yet the CEO of Match.com felt that Tinder "gives people what they want: an easier and faster way to meet someone new in real time" (James 2015, 16). Tinder profiles are mainly focused on pictures – as the users can upload up to six of them without having to upgrade their account – and little information about the user is provided – compared to the information available on Grindr –, encouraging users that physically like each other to ask for more information. According to Jessica James, Tinder affords minimal effort from the user, as it can be easily accessed via a smartphone device and "with just a swipe of the finger, Tinder users can find, or rather, select, romantic matches based on individual preference" (James 2015, 14).

On Grindr, only one picture is available unless the user upgrades to GrindrXtra. Users are encouraged to upgrade if they want to increase their visibility through the app. Considering that the app is based on being able to check who is around, this is an important feature. Grindr's "Saved Phrases" feature affords little effort from the user (Grindr 2015), as they are able to choose between used phrases of their choice.

Along with Tinder's similarity to a deck of cards, it's "It's a Match" screen – where it clearly asks the user to "Keep playing" – affords playfulness (Fig. 9). Taking James' contribution on Tinder being an app to boost self-esteem of its users (James 2015), my interpretation of the game-like design of the app is that it is closely related to it. Therefore, this could be related, again, to James' assumption of heterosexual users of Tinder as being narcissists.

Checking cycles on Grindr to see who is gay in the area (Aunspach 2015, 5) and on Tinder who see who is available and on Tinder around the user, also afford playfulness, increasing engagement from the users.

Shallowness

Tinder's interface – showing one user at a time – forces them to express their opinion about every other user based on their looks. According to some authors like journalists Baxter and Cashmore and London, Tinder affords shallowness (Baxter and Cashmore 2013; London 2015), as the opinions are based on immediate physical attraction. Grindr's interface, which is also focused on pictures and the information in the profiles is based on physical traits of the users (Fig. 11) and, according to Woo, it also affords shallowness. This relates to the persistent notion of physicality found on Grindr and the affordance of proximity.

Aunspach argues that digital cruising and queer congregation, also defined in this research as community identification, are afforded by the visibility of the erotic on Grindr, as it is shown in quite explicit terms, and relates it to circulation of sexual pleasure (Aunspach 2015, 61). Also, the way the app markets itself – the main grid (Fig. 6) shows pictures of naked male bodies and the sample chats (Fig. 12 and 13) – may lead to interpretations of its use that could include shallow and sexualized behaviors, the latter being a constant assumption of the gay community (Freeman 2014; Race 2015; VanderMolen 2013; Aunspach 2015).

Tinder contrasts with the way it markets itself on its website, where a series of stories of successful relationships try to fight against the prejudices that claimed that Tinder is shallow (London 2015) and leads to promiscuity (Austin 2015). The stories promote heteronormativity, as the app markets itself as an app for heterosexual and homosexual communities, but all the stories on the website refer to heterosexual couples with romantic references (Fig. 17), perpetuating the assumption that same-sex relationships are expected to end up in proposal and marriage (Aunspach 2015, 33). They are also written by female users, and using phrases like "He used Tinder to propose to me!", "He proposed after a helicopter ride!", "I was so nervous, he was too perfect!" (Tinder 2015), preserving the stereotype that VanderMolen described when presumed that heterosexuals tend to prefer a traditional approach where traditional gender-specific roles are maintained (VanderMolen 2013, 278).
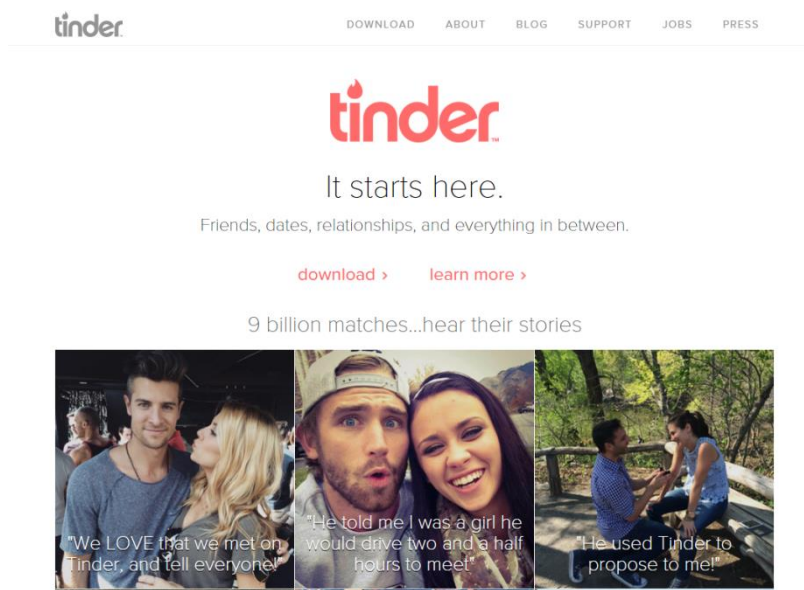
Figure 17. Screenshot of Tinder's homepage showing stories of successful relationships (Tinder 2015)

Legitimacy

The possibility to report or block a user in both apps affords legitimacy, a way for the users to feel that they can avoid undesired profiles. In a video where GrindrXtra is advertised, users claim that reporting is easier on the paid version, because it is unlimited (Grindr 2012). This shows the importance for Grindr users to be able to report a user at any time.

On Tinder, legitimacy is afforded by means of being woman-friendly (Dries 2013). That is, in this app, women can engage in conversations only with men they already like, so as to prevent online harassment. This affordance perpetuates the assumption made by VanderMolen that men must initiate contact in heterosexual relationships because it is expected from them (VanderMolen 2013, 280). Fighting against unwanted conversations reinforces this stereotype.

Homogenization

Finally, Aunspach criticizes the homogenization of Grindr, as he claims that profiles and pictures are all sized and cropped the same, making the identities of the users uniform (2015, 29). He believes there is a lack of sensual experience as every profile feels the same after being touched by the user, leading to a "dehumanization of other users" (ibid.). The fact that users can be blocked and removed from "the experience of the application", framing a user's surroundings within the gay space to be "pleasing or homogenizing as desired", affords a "hyper-individualized" experience (Aunspach 2015, 38). While there might be a tendency of standardization of the profiles, Aunspach opposes the design of the app to diversity, and the fact that the profiles allow the users to describe themselves and identify with a community – a Grindr Tribe –, demonstrates that this affordance is vague.

However, considering that, both on Grindr and Tinder, some profiles will be hidden depending on the users' preferences and filters, the resultant grid – on Grindr – and potential matches – on Tinder – will be more pleasant to the eyes of the users. In this sense, a hyper-individualized experience distances the users from reality, which is what both apps advocate (James 2015, 16).

Conclusions

This thesis aimed to answer the following research question: how are normative assumptions about heterosexual and male homosexual communities embedded in the affordances of Tinder and Grindr? I examined the different affordances that Grindr and Tinder provide, in order to explore the existence of ideological assumptions in the apps.

Firstly, a theoretical approach helped me formulate a clear approach of what I understood as affordances. The notion of affordances that I described is supported by previous work from Gibson, Norman, Raudaskoski, and Schrock. Consequently, I concluded that affordances are built in the context between the user and the object. That is, there are factors in the environment that will affect the perception of the affordances. In this sense, it can be said that analyzing affordances critically and objectively is cumbersome as the interpretations will be influenced in a great measure by opinions and presuppositions. Considering that technology is not neutral, and the affordances are likewise unbiased, this thesis might show different results if researched by another author – having the same or another sexual orientation as me.

In this regard, considering that I considered that Race and Aunspach's work was useful but questionable to some extent, my work is also problematic. Taking into account that the affordances are in the context, throughout the analysis of this thesis, some of the outlined affordances might not be objectively embedded in the app, but are affected by the environment in which they have been analyzed. I belong to the heterosexual community and, therefore, I am also influenced by assumptions from both the heterosexual and the male homosexual communities.

However, this work explores how certain aspects of the apps might re-enforce the existence of several normative assumptions that authors have associated to the communities. The male homosexual community has traditionally been related to promiscuity and hyper-sexualized behaviors (Aunspach 2015; Freeman 2014; Race 2015; Van de Wiele and Tong 2014; VanderMolen 2013). These stereotypes might be related to the affordances of proximity and immediacy. Proximity can be related to physicality on Grindr, which relates to the physical and sexual implications of the name of the app, perpetuating sexual connotations about the male homosexual community. Also, Grindr allows users to show other users that they are looking for other users who would be willing to meet "Right Now", as well as the distance and time that it will take them to meet each other. This might encourage the users to arrange an immediate meeting, which, in turn, can be associated to the premise that VanderMolen and Race assumed as stereotypical of the gay community: they are constantly looking for sexual encounters, as opposed to the heterosexual community. However, the sample chat offered by Tinder on its website, shows a conversation that seeks for an immediate meeting, debunking the assumption of promiscuity as being exclusively a characteristic of the gay community (Aunspach 2015). On the other hand, the ways the chat and the grid are designed and marketed on their website might also lead to assumptions linked to promiscuity, because it shows pictures of naked male bodies. This characteristic can also be linked to shallowness and sexualized behaviors, which have also traditionally been an assumption of the gay community (Aunspach 2015; Freeman 2014; Race 2015; VanderMolen 2013).

The assumption of the gay community as behaving impersonally and exchanging sexually motivated conversations (Freeman 2014; Park 2014) might be related to the feature "Saved phrases" available on Grindr, though the app does not market sexualized expressions on its examples, but rather immediate meetings.

Greenfield assumed that the homosexual community is not as diverse as the heterosexual one (2014) and Aunspach criticizes the homogenization of the profiles on Grindr due to the design of its interface (2015, 29). In this sense, Greenfield's stereotype of the gay community as being uniform could be re-enforced by this affordance.

Finally, VanderMolen claimed that male homosexuals are less concerned with the age of their partners because of procreation matters (2013, 279). This generalization might be perpetuated with the fact that Grindr users can hide the age of their profiles. That is, maintaining their anonymity.

The heterosexual community, meanwhile, has been popularly connected to a softer tone and more romantic approach compared to the male homosexual one (Greenfield 2014). It is assumed that, in a heterosexual relationship, a romantic spark is needed, as well as a process of flirtation that will lead to marriage (Aunspach 2015, 33). These conceptions about the community may be embedded in the way communication flow is afforded, because Tinder provides its users with shared interests and are considered to be an important factor when engaging with other users, as opposed to the exclusively physical description of the profiles on Grindr.

VanderMolen argued that heterosexual individuals prefer a traditional approach in dating, maintaining traditional gender-specific roles (2013, 278). The way Tinder is marketed on its website, where a series of romantic stories, presumably originated on Tinder, are shared, promotes heteronormativity and perpetuates what Aunspach and VanderMolen considered to be a main characteristic of the heterosexual community. Moreover, the phrases used by the writers of the stories, as explained in the analysis, support VanderMolen traditional approach. VanderMolen also claimed that men are responsible for initiating verbal contact and women should follow their lead (2013, 280), which may be perpetuated due to the affordance of legitimacy on Tinder, where men can only initiate a conversation with women when they have already liked them back.

Moreover, heterosexuals are stigmatized as "narcissists" (James 2015, 16) that need physical acceptance by others. This stigma might be related to Finkel et al.'s argument that, in online dating, "matching" (2012, 6) is no longer about compatibility, but about physical attraction between users. This assumption is also supported by Baxter and Cashmore and London, who claim that Tinder affords shallowness because the opinions of users are based on immediate physical attraction.

Discussion

This thesis has explored the existence of normative assumptions embedded in mobile dating apps such as Grindr and Tinder. Even though my point of view in researching affordances might have been subject to problematic interpretations, the methodology has proved to be useful. Approaching the analysis from an affordance perspective is the most suitable way to identify stereotypes or particularities from the heterosexual and male homosexual communities.

Using Grindr and Tinder allowed me to compare and contrast them with each other, which was an excellent way to perceive aspects that would have been more difficult to spot if I would have only focused on one app and one community. Some of the assumptions of the communities were deduced from previous literature or articles, while other stereotypes emerged throughout the research.

Future research on this topic might focus on the discourse that defines these mobile dating apps, not only the affordances. A discourse analysis would be more suitable for that type of research. Only focusing on the homosexual community – male and female – may add an interesting perspective, as well as researching it from the point of view of another community. Similarly, analyzing other dating apps targeted at other communities might add an interesting angle to a research. It may also be suitable to explore the evolution of dating sties and dating apps considering the assumptions and the perceptions of the communities, as well as considering how the phenomenon of online dating is perceived. Also, future research may focus on how stigmatization of both communities affects the use of the apps, which could be approach with an ethnographic methodology or applying a uses and gratifications theory.

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