

Translating Grindr: Gay Men's Identity to Place in a
Digitalised World

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ABSTRACT

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Internet websites and other online spaces developed as popular tools for men in search of other men. Social commentators and geographers have suggested that these online spaces are, in part, contributing to the decline of traditional gay bars. Research from sociology and public health, however, complicates this assumption by suggesting that online spaces may not necessarily change how men use gay bars and clubs. In an effort to better understand the geographical implications of use of these online spaces and their users, this paper examines the popular smart phone application *Grindr*. Through surveys ($n=62$) and in-depth interviews ($n=14$) of Seattle area *Grindr* users, this paper argues that men who use online spaces in search of other men do so for a variety of reasons. Most significantly, users use the online space in order to negotiate gay-identified physical spaces. This paper urges geographers to further investigate the relationship between physical spaces and those online.

ABRÉGÉ

Dans la première décennie du XXI^e siècle, les sites Internet et autres espaces en ligne mis au point des outils populaires pour les hommes à la recherche d'autres hommes. Commentateurs sociaux et des géographes ont suggéré que ces espaces en ligne sont, en partie, contribués à la baisse des traditionnels bars gays. Recherche de la sociologie et de la santé publique; cependant compliquer cette hypothèse en suggérant que les espaces en ligne ne sont pas nécessairement changé la façon dont les hommes utilisent bars et clubs gays. Dans un effort pour mieux comprendre les implications géographiques de l'utilisation de ces espaces en ligne et leurs utilisateurs, ce document examine l'application du téléphone intelligent populaire Grindr. Grâce à des enquêtes ($n=62$) et des entrevues ($n=14$) en profondeur des utilisateurs de Seattle Grindr la région de cet article soutient que les hommes qui utilisent des espaces en ligne à la recherche d'autres hommes le font pour diverses raisons. Plus important encore, les utilisateurs utilisent l'espace en ligne afin de négocier homosexuels identifiés espaces physiques. Ce document invite les géographes pour étudier plus avant la relation entre les espaces physiques et les personnes en ligne.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

On a late July night, I was at a Seattle coffee house with a friend of mine. I typed away in the hopes of completing my thesis soon, while he had the luxury of watching YouTube videos of half-naked men. We both felt his phone vibrate in between us. It was a new message for him on Grindr, a social networking application for men in search of other men. “Oh, just another old man. Again,” he said. I reminded him of the hot guys his age who had contacted him, but he would have none of it. He set his phone down and went back to his YouTube video, and I went back to my writing. Just another night.

Among my friends, Grindr is a common part of our conversations and interactions. We show each other pictures of the latest guys we have been talking to, we “favourite” and message one another, and we even track each other’s movement through the city. We muse over the misspellings in profiles, the bewildering pick-up lines such as “Lets hang out in are under wear” (misspellings and all), and of course those sexy men. Within my circle of friends, Grindr has never been a taboo topic; rather, it has been another form of entertainment along with Facebook, YouTube, and blogs. Yes, we do look for and find sex on Grindr (some more successfully than others), yet it is more than that. For me, it’s about the late night conversations with my friends, the chance to kill time, and the opportunity to meet someone new-- either for a friendship, a relationship, sex, or all three.

In the spirit of a feminist approach to research, and an understanding that my work is not done in isolation from my own experiences of the issues I am writing about, it is critical that I contextualize my work (also see Hervik 1004, Gearing 1995, and Gold 2002). There are two critical aspects of my

thesis: my focus on Grindr as an online space, and on Seattle as my research area. As I discussed above, my understanding and experience of Grindr goes beyond sex; in many ways, Grindr is part of my everyday life, along the lines of other online social mediums such as Facebook. In addition to my own experiences with Grindr, I am also intimately familiar with the setting for my research, the city of Seattle in the US state of Washington. Seattle is not only where I was born and raised, but it is also where I went to college and became engaged with civic politics. As the saying goes, the heart grows fonder with distance, and from my time in Montreal as a graduate student at McGill University, I can attest that this saying seems to fit well in this case.

This introductory chapter is meant to introduce Seattle and Grindr to not only justify the focus on them in my thesis, but also to discuss how I understand them. The first section is about growing up in Seattle, becoming familiar with Capitol Hill, the city's gay neighbourhood, and how I used the Internet and later Grindr to meet other men. The following section provides justification for my focus on Grindr, and describes what exactly Grindr is and how it works. The third section discusses Seattle and its well-known LGBT community. Finally, the last section provides an overview of the thesis.

Seattle and Grindr: A Personal Story

Growing up in Shoreline, Washington (an inner-city suburb of Seattle), I only became aware of Seattle's Capitol Hill as being synonymous with being gay after I became aware of my own sexuality in my mid-teens. At fifteen years old, I was limited to the places where I could explore my sexuality not only by age, but by mobility as well. Most of the images I associated with being gay were in bars and clubs on Capitol Hill. Not only was I not able to get into these spaces because of my age, but Capitol Hill was nearly an hour and a half and three bus transfers away from where I lived. Like many others, I

first started meeting gay men online. Popular online destinations for me were America Online (AOL) and Yahoo chat rooms that offered spaces meant for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth based on geographic location. Not only did I meet other gay teens in these chat rooms, but I often met them in-person. Although several of these encounters involved an element of sex, they also served as opportunities to learn about venues where I could meet other gay men. I learned about support groups for LGBT youth, I heard about popular gay bars/clubs, and I found out about different events for LGBT youth. Time and again places like these were found on Capitol Hill. As I started visiting places such as Lambert House, an LGBT support center for youth, or going to youth parties during Pride, I began to sense that it was not the specific places that mattered most to me. Rather, it was the neighbourhood in general that made me feel more comfortable with myself.

Geographer Michael Brown offers the perfect vignette to describe not only the sense of safety one has while on Capitol Hill but also how interlinked the neighbourhood is to a gay identity:

The Seattle Metro bus no. 7 stopped abruptly to pick up two very wet people just at the crest of Capitol Hill on a rainy Tuesday afternoon. The sudden braking caught everyone's attention, and broke the passionate soul kissing of a man and woman sitting just across from me. Since I was sitting toward the rear of the dingy bus, I had a long view of a slender, trendy woman making her way purposefully down the aisle. Behind her, I heard her companion before I could see him. We all could, because he was speaking so loudly. With a mixture of aplomb and hubris our new rider proclaimed, "That's right, people, I'm swinging my hips as I walk on by. And if you don't like it, you can kiss my beautiful queer ass!" With regal camp he sashayed down the aisle, past my seat, never once breaking his stare forward. On the other side of the aisle, the young heterosexual couple "tsked," huffed and "Oh, Gawwwwd"-ed this young gay man just audibly enough to make their revulsion clear to those of us in the back of the bus. "Who said that?" the gay man demanded loudly.

Everyone on the bus began to grow uncomfortable. After all, this was Seattle. “I did,” the woman stated loud and clear, but without turning to face him. Then she whispered something inaudible to her boyfriend and they both laughed. “Well if you don’t like it, girlfriend, *what the hell you doin’* up on Capitol Hill in the first place!” (Brown 2000, emphasis in original).

Although some places were available to me, such as youth centers and events for LGBT youth, the neighbourhood itself offered provocative images all around. Whether it was flamboyant men enjoying coffee with friends, gay bookshops (and the covert snooping at men’s bodies both in the magazines and in the store), or the rainbow flags and sex shops with dildos in the window, I knew I was not in Shoreline anymore: Capitol Hill was the place where people like me went to be more like themselves. These private thoughts that I kept to myself at home in Shoreline were suddenly made public in Capitol Hill.

As I grew older, Capitol Hill became more of a regular fixture in my life. I started going to gay bars and clubs such as the Cuff, R Place, and C.C. Attle’s. I became familiar with the neighbourhood’s gay-friendly restaurants and cafes along with the gay health clinic for free HIV testing. Though the years, however, I began to notice how the neighbourhood and these spaces that I had only recently become familiar with were changing. My favourite gay bookshops were closing, bars and clubs where I had been confident were frequented by gay men only were becoming popular with straight men, and gay bars that I dreamed of going to when I was younger were closed and demolished by the time I was 21. In my short time as a young gay man I have experienced significant changes in my city’s “gaybourhood.”

In my senior year of my undergraduate work in Urban Studies at the University of Washington Tacoma, I began to take an academic interest in the changes that I had been observing on Capitol Hill. While doing research

for my senior thesis on the topic of changing gay neighbourhoods I came across the work of Brad Ruting (2007), who describes changes in Sydney Australia's "gaybourhood" in economic terms. Although Ruting's article and subsequent work in 2008 focuses on several factors contributing to the "de-gayng" process of the Darlinghurst neighbourhood, I was particularly interested in Ruting's claim that the Internet was among these contributing factors. Though the argument seems simple enough, "why would gay men go out to a bar when they could find someone online from home," I could not help but think about my own experience in gay chat rooms and being a frequent patron of gay bars and clubs.

Ruting's notion of the Internet was stoic and immalleable in comparison with the rapidly changing possibilities of what the Internet could offer. Like Ruting, certain online spaces were well known to me such as Yahoo chat, craigslist personal ads, and more vibrant websites such as gay.com. In 2008, however, I got an iPhone and was able to download an application called Grindr. Similar to gay.com, the application allowed me to have a profile and chat with other users. What was most significant and different about Grindr was that I was able to visually see other users based on their geographical proximity to my own location on a device that went everywhere I went. More traditional websites like gay.com, and those referred to by Ruting, were convenient to use when I was sitting in front of my computer looking to entertain myself; Grindr served a similar purpose when I was not in front of my computer. Smart phones and applications like Grindr introduced a unique form of mobility in experiencing the Internet and online spaces.

The argument put forward by Ruting and others (Campbell 2004, Johnston & Longhurst 2010, Sullivan 2005, Usher & Morrison 2010) does not

resonate with my own experience as a young gay man coming of age in Seattle in the 2000s. There is no doubt that the Internet and online spaces were a critical forum for me to meet other gay men in Seattle; these online spaces have provided several opportunities either in friendship, casual sex, or relationships. Yet, despite these online spaces, Capitol Hill and Seattle's gay spaces remained important places for me. Meeting individual men for whatever purpose by way of the Internet has a certain allure and practicality, but at the same time these individualized experiences cannot replicate the sense of comfort and safety one feels (and that the quote from Michael Brown above captures) while on Capitol Hill. The development and popularity of smart phone applications like Grindr shows us that there is perhaps a way to have the practicality of online spaces and the experience of physical places simultaneously.

What is Grindr?

Grindr is a location-based social application designed so that "Gay, bi, and curious men" can connect with other men in their vicinity using GPS capabilities. The application is primarily found on smart phones such as iPhone, Android, or BlackBerry, but it can also be used on other mobile devices, such as the iPod Touch and iPad. Similar to traditional dating websites, users are invited to create profiles that include information such as their age, height, weight, ethnicity, relationship status, and what types of relationships they are looking for on Grindr. Users are also able to provide photos and brief introductions to those who visit their profile. Once users have set up profiles they are able to view other users in their area as a grid of thumbnails. Those who are geographically closer are given priority over other users, as they are presented at the top of the grid while those farther away are listed toward the bottom. Users are able to select thumbnails in order to see

the full profile of one particular user and are then able to chat with them. A few other functions are provided to users, such as the ability to add a profile to their favourites, which essentially acts as a bookmark, allowing users to always have access to the profile (and thus the ability to chat with the other user) no matter their location. Users also have the option to block profiles, preventing the other user from contacting them and removing the other user all together from their list of users in the area. The blocking function is one way users can filter other users. Users can also place restrictions on the age of other users who may access their profile. For example, I might only want to see other users between the ages of 20 and 35. Not only will I only see users with an age in this age range, but users outside of this age range will not be able to see my profile. According to the company's fact sheet:

Grindr is easy to use and completely discreet. You don't need an account to use Grindr. Simply launch Grindr, upload an optional photo and profile details, and browse for men in your area who want to chat and meet (Grindr 2012).

According to Grindr, as of January 2012, the application had over 3.5 million users worldwide. Just under a million of those users can be found using the application on any given day spending on average 1.5 hours online. The company reports that up to 71,000 users are on Grindr at any given moment. The United States is reported to have by far the largest share of Grindr users at just over 1.4 million, followed by the United Kingdom (425,000) and France (224,000). The reported top Grindr cities are London (195,000 users), Paris (155,000), and New York (127,000). Out of the top 10 cities, 5 are from the United States. Seattle is ranked 5th in the US (10th in the world), with 60,000 Grindr users.

Why Seattle?

Michael Brown's vignette and my own story of Capitol Hill highlight the significance of this neighbourhood to a gay identity in Seattle. Capitol Hill and the city's influential LGBT community are well known around the world. Despite this prominence, there has been a limited amount of research done in Seattle (notable exceptions are Paulson & Simpson 1996, Atkins 2003, and Brown *et al* 2011). In answering geographer Gavin Brown's (2008) call for more research by queer geographers into more "ordinary cities," this work seeks to provide insights into a city often overlooked by queer geographers. The large gay community, well established gay neighbourhood, and my own personal knowledge make Seattle a compelling city for this study.

Starbucks, Boeing, Microsoft, Jimi Hendrix, Nirvana, and of course rain usually come to mind when people think of Seattle, yet the city is also known for its annual Pride parade, personalities such as Dan Savage, and the Seattle Gay Men's chorus. In listing Seattle as one of "America's Gayest Cities" (ranking 5th), *The Advocate* writes,

When Forbes named Seattle the most miserable sports city in the nation, many of us felt a twinge of empathy. No matter; there's heaps of other stuff to keep us busy, including tons of locavore and cosmopolitan cuisine, funky bars in a robust LGBT scene, Dan Savage, and hookups — or at least the search for them. TheStir.com noted that Seattle ranks among the top cities for residents who list "casual sex" as the type of relationship they're seeking (Breen 2012).

Recently Seattle was profiled by the popular gay francophone magazine *TÊTU Voyage*, where Capitol Hill was described as being half way between Paris's gay neighbourhood, the Marais, and New York City's Village, with a little grunge mixed in. The magazine goes on to say,

A little bit bohemian, a little bit beatnik, a little bit destroy: the neighborhood looks quite eclectic at first sight. The arty, student, and hip fauna that visit this neighborhood make it a place quite precise in

terms of trends. Clothing, tattoos, haircuts: one would think he's in New York, London and Tokyo at the same time. Everyone has a look that is well-thought and relax (sic) at the same time. Many bars, restaurants, clubs, art galleries as well as gay designs and gay-friendly boutiques are located there (Ogiela 2012, translation provided by Samuel Dubois, McGill Geography '11).

Although these quotes demonstrate the recognition Seattle has received around the world for its LGBTQ community and Capitol Hill, there has been a limited amount of research done about the city and its queer geography. Some existing key texts include *An Evening at the Garden of Allah* by Don Paulson and *Gay Seattle* by Gary Atkins. Both are substantial texts that document Seattle's gay spaces and how they have changed through the twentieth century. More recent work about Seattle's queer geographies can be seen in "Queering Gay Space" from *Seattle Geographies* by Michael Brown, Sean Wang, and Larry Knopp. Although this article is far more limited than the work of Atkins and Paulson, it represents a contemporary understanding of Seattle's queer geography. The authors write,

Ask anyone where the gay or queer area in Seattle is, and more than likely they'll say "Capitol Hill, of course!" This relatively dense, inner-city neighborhood in the center of the city is somewhat akin to districts like the Castro in San Francisco or Greenwich Village in New York (Brown *et al* 2011).

In 2008, queer geographer Gavin Brown called on the subfield to pay attention to more "ordinary cities" in studying space and sexuality. Brown argues that queer geographers have generally focused on a handful of cities that have become the benchmark standard in academic work. While there are a number of examples where academic work focuses more on "peripheral" cities, there continues to be a need for research to be done in academically lesser known cities such as Seattle. My own knowledge of Seattle, the city's well known and well established LGBT community, and

Seattle's outsized proportion of Grindr users make it well positioned to be the focus of this study.

Thesis Overview

The next chapter in my thesis provides a review of the literature and exposes critical gaps in understanding the relationship between users of gay online spaces and physical gay-identified spaces. Several queer geographers, scholars from other disciplines, and social commentators have followed Brad Ruting's example in arguing that the Internet is contributing to the "de-gaying" of traditional gay neighbourhoods in Western cities. At the same time, more empirical evidence is provided by other researchers that complicate this claim, suggesting that users of gay online spaces not only often frequent gay identified physical spaces, but also use the online spaces as a way to negotiate and navigate the physical spaces they seek out. In order to address this fissure in the literature, the following questions guide this thesis: How are gay men using Grindr? What types of interactions are they having? Do these men also visit local gay bars and clubs?

In order to address these questions, the third chapter of this thesis reviews my methodological approach, detailing how I collected data in the field and then analyzed the information gathered. After a review of previous studies examining how gay men use online spaces to meet other men, I employed two commonly used methods of collecting data: surveys and semi-structured interviews. An online survey was developed so that a greater breadth of potential participants could be reached and so that participants could easily complete the survey at their own discretion. The survey questions were developed in an effort to better gauge participants' socio-demographics, level of involvement in the local gay community, and the ways in which they use Grindr. At the end of the online survey, participants were invited to be

interviewed. The semi-structured follow-up interviews allowed participants to provide much greater detail about their involvement with the local gay community, how often they go out to gay venues, their reasons for going out, where they usually go out, what types of interactions have they had on Grindr, who have they met on Grindr, and so forth. While the survey provided quantifiable data, it is commonly held that qualitative data provides a unique perspective (Limb *et al* 2001, Hoggart *et al* 2002, Flowerdew 2008, Hay 2010, Dwyer *et al* 2010). The semi-structured interviews were meant not only to provide participants with the opportunity to become more a part of the project itself, but to give them the chance to relate their experience of Seattle area gay-identified places and their use of Grindr in their own words. Using these two approaches not only allowed for a greater wealth of information to be collected, but also added academic rigor to this project by triangulating and cross-referencing the results of the two different data sets. Finally, an analysis of the data was completed using a statistical analysis of the survey data, while grounded theory was used in analyzing the interview transcripts.

Chapters four and five offer a review and analysis of the data results from both the survey and semi-structured interviews. Chapter four provides an in-depth review of the online survey results, which demonstrate that participants' use of Grindr is more casual in nature, and that multiple strategies are utilized in order to meet other men including Grindr, gay bars/clubs, and more traditional online spaces. While these statistics provide a general profile of Seattle area Grindr users, chapter five provides additional details for our understanding of how users engage with local gay-identified places and how the application is made part of their day to day lives. Through an analysis of the semi-structured interviews, chapter five

identifies three prevalent themes: convenience, efficiency, and negotiation of space. These themes, along with the statistical analysis from chapter four, illustrate how a sample of Seattle area Grindr users engage with local gay-identified places and Grindr.

Finally, in chapter six, we review the original research questions and the findings and analysis of the fieldwork. We conclude that research participants engage with smart phone applications like Grindr in order to provide a more individualized experience of the places and spaces they visit. In many ways, Grindr was a form of entertainment for many research participants. It was often used during periods of “boredom” or downtime. At the same time, these Grindr users noted that they went to Capitol Hill frequently to socialize with friends and to meet other men. Whether users opened the application while on their commute into work or while they were at a local gay bar with their friends, Grindr provided them the opportunity to alter their experience. In chapter two, I identified a critical gap in the literature that failed to understand new ways of interacting with online spaces and how users of these online spaces also interact with gay identified physical locations such as gay bars and clubs. My conclusions help to bridge this gap by suggesting that users of mobile smart phone applications such as Grindr passively engage with the online space to which it gives access. At the same time, these online spaces are activated by the physical spaces in which they are used. Instead of getting lost in an online world of chatrooms and headless photos, the online space of Grindr demands that users consider their surroundings for increased possibilities and diversity in other users.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In the well known gay neighbourhood of Capitol Hill in Seattle, Washington, hanging next to the front entrance of a bar is a sign that reads, “ATTN: THIS IS A GAY BAR. A VERY GAY BAR. IF YOU AREN’T A QUEER OR AN ADMIRER, DON’T ENTER” (Underlines in original text, Brown *et al* 2011). Other signs similar in nature to this one can be found throughout Capitol Hill and other gay neighbourhoods in Western cities. While intending to indicate the presences of a gay establishment for gay customers, they also are a marker of changes to the local neighbourhood.

Over the past three decades, the global economy has gone through major restructuring. Today goods, people, and capital flow with ease from one side of the world to the other. The spatial implications of this restructuring have been significant. For instance, the companies and corporations that coordinate these flows choose to locate themselves in cities that have certain characteristics that are seen as desirable by the workforces that they require. Cities then compete against each other to demonstrate that they have what this professional class is looking for in a city, including gay neighbourhoods and quality urban living.

As these cities market their gay neighbourhoods and pride events, many authors have noted that these neighbourhoods begin to gentrify and become less gay. Straight people begin going to gay bars more frequently, there is an increased demand for housing and retail space that ends up driving up costs, and eventually gay bars start to close and are replaced with mixed establishments and mainstream stores. While it is clear that city marketing has played a factor in this “de-gaying” process, some authors have wondered what the role of the Internet has been. Those geographers who

have considered this question have suggested that the queer community is finding the Internet to be an alternative to using gay physical spaces less.

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the “de-gaying” of gay neighbourhoods and explore the suggestion that the Internet has contributed in some fashion. In the first section, neoliberal policies and the marketing of cities will be discussed to show the gentrification of gay neighbourhoods is part of a larger discourse considering global economic forces and their impact on cities. The second section will look at Richard Florida’s argument of the *creative class*, which will demonstrate more precisely that cities are competing against each other in order to attract a professional class that will ultimately entice major corporations and companies to locate themselves in these respective cities. The “de-gaying” of gay neighbourhoods will be examined in the third section by looking at Oxford Street and Darlinghurst in Sydney, Australia and Capitol Hill in Seattle, USA. Some authors believe that the Internet has played a role in the gentrification of these neighbourhoods, so in the fourth section, literature that supports this position will be discussed. Finally, other literature that also examines Internet use among gay men will be addressed, demonstrating that there is another position to consider when thinking about how gay men use online spaces and how those men use gay physical spaces.

In conclusion, geographers who have suggested that gay men use the Internet in avoiding gay neighbourhoods have not considered other literature that argues otherwise. As online gay spaces become increasingly dynamic, accessible, and mainstreamed through smart phone technology and applications such as Grindr, the intersection between virtual and physical spaces become even more consequential. In a time when men can turn on hand held devices anywhere anytime and interact with other men near to

their geographical location, geographers need to explore how men use these services and what is their relationship to gay physical spaces. By considering these new technologies and questions, geographers may be better equipped to look at the process of “de-gaying” neighbourhoods and the growing use of technology in society.

Neoliberal Policies and the Marketing of Cities

World City theorists have identified the world’s current predominant economic system as embodying a neoliberal ideology that embraces free market policies and attempts to break down artificial state borders in the movement of goods, people, and capital (Peck 2005, Brenner 1998, Brenner & Theodore 2002, Smith 2002, Peck & Tickell 2002). This is in stark contrast to the postwar Fordest-Keynasian period where the global economy was centred on state-oriented economic policies, which sought to grow and redistribute wealth within their respective borders (Brenner & Theodore 2002). Today, the global economy is dominated by the idea that states should not restrict the movement of goods, people and capital. This ideology is enacted into reality through the policies pursued by international organisations such as the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and World Trade Organisation (Brenner & Theodore 2002). European and North American countries that believe neoliberal policies to be the best way to achieve global economic prosperity largely direct the policies of these organisations.

For Saskia Sassen (1999) and Neil Brenner (1998), neoliberal economic policies have led to a restructuring of global spatial scales in which the role of cities is much greater in influencing the world economy. Sassen (1999) has argued that as neoliberal policies have dispersed economically throughout the world, the coordination of these activities have become highly concentrated in only a few cities. An example of this process can be found in a private corporation such as the Boeing Company. Among other things, Boeing manufactures commercial and defence aircrafts by contracting with several contractors worldwide for the various parts needed to complete the final product. While final assembly of Boeing products is usually completed in the United States, the parts used in final assembly come from anywhere in the world where it was expected to be cheaper for the company to contract the work. The work done in completing a final product is performed across the globe, yet all of it is coordinated from Boeing headquarters in Chicago, USA. This business model is repeated time and again, and for Sassen (1999), what is significant in this model are the cities in which these companies locate themselves and coordinate their activities.

For Neil Brenner (1998), an important question is why these companies locate themselves where they do. One argument is that the choice of location is geographic; while another argument is economical, and yet others like Brenner point to culture. The kind of employees that companies require for their centralized coordination efforts are professional white collar

workers who, among other things, are attracted to urban living environments that offer a sense of diversity. For Brenner and others (Brenner 1998, Brenner & Theodore 2002, Florida 2002), companies and their employees are attracted to specific cities for the cultures they are believed to have. If a city is believed to have a sense of diversity and high quality of life, companies are going to be tempted to locate themselves there in order to attract and retain the high quality employees they need to remain competitive on the market. What is critical in this understanding of neoliberal economic policies and their impact on cities is that this dynamic has resulted in city marketing and inter-urban competition (Brenner 1998). While other impacts of neoliberal policies on the city have been examined and raise important questions, this paper will remain focused on the marketing of cities and how cities compete with each other for capital investment, and specifically how gay neighbourhoods and events have been affected by this process.

The Rise of the Creative Class and Richard Florida

Richard Florida (2002) recognizes the new role for cities in the globalized neoliberal market economy as described by Sassen (1999) and Brenner (1998), and argues that this has forged a new economic class in the United States and elsewhere that he refers to as the *Creative Class*. For those cities that do well in attracting members of this new class, Florida (2002) says that they have common characteristics as “plug-and-play communities” where there is such a diversity of activities, people, and places that anyone can fit in relatively quickly. These “creative cities” exhibit a sense of diversity through different people, food, opinions, music, and outdoor activities. This diversity is manifested through theatres, cafes, art galleries, and recreational places that support, for example, jogging or kayaking. In addition to these amenities, Florida (2002) argues that the creative class also wants a sense of

place, a place that is unique and authentic like themselves. This translates into historic preservation of buildings, displaying a unique music and/or cultural scene, and drawing upon other “authentic” attributes of a community. The creative class seeks a unique and diverse city that will offer plenty of opportunities for new experiences, genuine interactions, and stimulating activities.

Florida (2002) writes that cities that appear to embrace differences are often also economically better off. Cities with vibrant ethnic communities and a high proportion of gay individuals often attract young professionals, which in turn provides for a high concentration of college-educated workers that companies desire. In making this argument, Florida (2002) created the “gay index,” which ranked cities according to the concentration of same-sex couples based on the 2000 US Census. When the gay index was compared with another Florida (2002) creation, the high-tech index, which measured concentration of technology-based businesses, a strong correlation between the two was revealed. For example, Seattle ranked 3rd in the high-tech index and 8th in the gay index. Seattle was not alone in this distinction, as Florida (2002) notes that cities that ranked in the top ten on the high-tech index often ranked in the top 10 in the gay index as well. Florida (2002) writes that:

Homosexuality represents the last frontier of diversity in our society, and thus a place that welcomes the gay community welcomes all kinds of people...For these reasons, openness to the gay community is a good indicator of the low entry barriers to human capital that are so important to spurring creativity and generating high-tech growth (256).

Inherent in Florida’s “Creative Class” argument is the recognition that cities must compete against each other in a neoliberal market-oriented global economy. To do so, cities must market themselves as being different and unique from other cities. One way to demonstrate uniqueness to the

professionals who coordinate the movement of capital around the world is to embrace the gay community. By ranking cities according to the degree that they embrace the gay community, and demonstrating a correlation between those rankings and those cities with a concentration of high-tech companies, Florida (2002) makes a strong case that cities should find ways to make themselves attractive to gays and lesbians.

The “creative class” argument has been well critiqued by several authors, and in particular by geographers. A key critic has been Jamie Peck (2005), who argues that the theory is more of a marketing strategy than an economic development approach meant to bring benefits to all levels of society. With local programs being developed with the names of *Cool Cities* in Michigan and *Creative Tampa* in the state of Florida, Peck (2005) argues that local officials are buying into a marketing strategy meant to merely beautify cities as opposed to bringing about real changes that will solve their most pressing social and economic problems. Peck (2005) points to several critics and even Florida’s own comments, which suggest that creative cities often have significant inequalities. The concern from the author is that a great deal of effort is going into a theory that may not really achieve the desired equitable goals of economic development, but rather focuses on the *Creative Class* (or roughly one third of the population).

For Peck (2005) and others (Binnie & Skeggs 2004, Binnie 2004, Rushbrook 2001, Markwell 2001, Bell & Binnie 2004, Doan & Higgins 2011), Florida’s economic development strategies are highly problematic when it comes to fostering a sense of diversity at the expense of actual communities already in existence. What is important for Florida is not the preservation of diverse communities but rather their marketisation by cities. One example of this marketisation by cities can be seen in the development and promotion of

Gay Pride parades and gay neighbourhoods (Binnie & Skeggs 2004, Binnie 2004, Rushbrook 2001, Markwell 2001, Bell & Binnie 2004, Doan & Higgins 2011). The promotion of these events and spaces has become a significant opportunity for many cities such as Sydney, Manchester, San Francisco, and Seattle to market themselves not only to a broader gay community but to non-gay people as well. In Seattle, for example, the Pride Parade and subsequent celebration was moved from Capitol Hill (the city's gaybourhood) to the Downtown and Seattle Center areas, where larger crowds could be hosted and a greater civic connection developed between the gay community and city icons such as the Space Needle (Turnbull 2006, Turnbull 2007). Similar marketing efforts have been documented in Sydney and elsewhere (Murphy & Watson 1996, Knopp 1998, Rushbrook 2001, Markwell 2001). These efforts demonstrate the need and desire by cities to be seen as diverse and accepting in order to attract Florida's creative class and the mobile capital that accompanies them. This marketisation of cities and the public display of gay communities is a result of neoliberal economic policies that encourage cities to compete against each other for capital investment.

The Creative Class Move In as Gaybourhoods Gentrify

As cities market themselves and display their gay communities in an effort to attract the creative class and mobile capital their efforts are showing signs of success. From Sydney, Australia to Seattle, USA gaybourhoods and pride events are increasingly ever more popular among heterosexuals who desire to live and experience a unique lifestyle (Matejskova 2007, Rushbrook 2001, Markwell 2001, Onstot 2008, Paduano 2008, Turnbull 2006, Turnbull 2007). The cities of Sydney and Seattle in many respects represent different kinds of cities. Sydney's gay pride celebrations are one of the world's largest and more

well-known whereas Seattle's gay community and events are less recognizable on the global circuit compared with Sydney. Yet in both these cities, neoliberal market-oriented policies and the marketisation of urban gay spaces plays out in similar fashion. While work has been done in several other cities such as San Francisco (Rubin 1998, Sides 2009), Atlanta (Doan & Higgins 2011), and Manchester (Binnie & Skeggs 2004), the cities of Seattle and Sydney will be explored here to provide examples of work done in these other cities.

In many western cities queer residential and commercial zones have become increasingly visible and attract a diverse public. Part of the visibility can be attributed to the success of gay rights movements and the economic recognition of the "queer market". Due to gay pride the changing politics of sexuality have meant that there is an increasing commercialisation and commodification of queer lifestyles. (Johnston 2005)

Author Lynda Johnston (2005) argues that gay districts in western cities are becoming increasingly gentrified, formerly being "queered" and currently being "heterosexualized." When the Mardi Gras Parade was first held in Sydney in 1978, it signified a moment when Sydney's gay community took the public streets (Faro & Wotherspoon 2000). Recently, however, the Mardi Gras Parade has become a major international event attracting millions of dollars to the city and state. For Murphy & Watson (1996) and Johnston (2005), this signature annual event and its growing audience is a sign of the changing users of Sydney's gaybourhood, Darlinghurst and in particular Oxford Street.

Today's Mardi Gras is no longer queer-exclusive, but rather a world-class event attracting both queer and non-queer visitors. Johnston (2005) writes that in attracting the straight community, physical barriers, such as fencing along the parade route, have been brought in to help distinguish

between queer (the other) and non-queer (normal) space. These barriers may seem innocuous at first, with their ostensible purpose of serving as a safety mechanism to protect parade participants from crowds on the street. However, their not-so-obvious role at the parades is to divide the queer space between what is and what is not queer.

Tourists are physically separated from the gay bodies on parade. When spatial segregation is maintained, there can be no confusion between heterosexual and homosexual bodies. The threat of sexualised transgression is, at one level, controlled. The dominant group (heterosexual tourists) can keep their distance from the Other (Johnston 2005).

This physical separation between the marginalized (queers) and the dominant (heterosexuals) allows for an increased comfort level for those in the latter group. Johnston observed how this separation created an environment where once queered streets were now heterosexualized. For example, among the heterosexuals in attendance, Johnston observed “coupling”, men asserting their ownership over female partners by draping their arms over them, hand holding, and even on occasion kissing and other sexual activities (Johnston 2005).

Johnston (2005) also observed that the majority of those viewing the parade along the street were not queer, but rather from the straight community. This is evident in an informal questionnaire Johnston (2005) had given out along the parade route and in her observations of local media. Through the survey, Johnston (2005) found that most on the street viewing the parade were heterosexual and notes that when gay media gave its suggestions on where to view the parade, it was often recommended that people hire hotel rooms, guest houses, or nearby restaurants with views of the parade.

This encroachment on the space of gays and lesbians has not gone unnoticed by the queer community. While the parade itself is difficult to

make queer-exclusive, organizers of the large after party have imposed restrictions on ticket sales to only those who identify as gay, lesbian, transsexual or transgender. Even bisexual individuals require additional scrutiny before admittance is granted (Rushbrook 2001). The encroachment on gay space in Darlinghurst has not only been felt during Mardi Gras but also in a declining daily gay presence in the neighbourhood and along Oxford Street.

Johnston (2005) and several authors (Murphy & Watson 1996, Rushbrook 2001, Markwell 2001, Ruting 2008, Reynolds 2009) argue that heterosexuals have been courted to visit, live, and play along Oxford Street. Arguing that in 1998 the Mardi Gras festival brought in an estimated \$99 million to the local economy, Rushbrook (2001) writes that the New South Wales state government significantly supported the event and assisted in its promotion. Writing about the impact the general promotion of these spaces have had on Sydney's gay enclave, Ruting (2008) states that an increasing housing demand in the area is a result of heterosexual buyers attracted to the gay urban space. Representative of this claim are numbers showing a 25% reduction of gay couples living in the area, additional "straight" bars, a general decline in gay bars since the late 1990's, and increasing violence against visibly gay men (Ruting 2008, Dick 2006). Reynolds (2009) has further explored issues of anti-gay violence along Oxford Street as a growing issue of concern for gay activist and in particular from organisers of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras.

A neighbourhood once claimed by Sydney's queer citizenry in the 1970's and 80's, Darlinghurst and Oxford Street have changed dramatically in the late 1990's and 2000's. The area was formerly a hotbed for political activism and gay social interaction, and spurred the now multimillion-dollar

Mardi Gras Parade. The space has been commercialized since its humble beginnings, and is now built and advertised for heterosexuals looking to have a taste of the gay community. The gay culture that is marketed in Sydney is also found in Seattle, where similar changes are taking place.

In Seattle, controversy arose in June 2006 when organizers of the annual Gay Pride Parade and fair decided to move the festivities from Capitol Hill, seen as the city's gay neighbourhood, to the Central Business District (CBD) and to Seattle Center (Turnbull 2006, Atkins 2003). In arguing for the move, Seattle Out and Proud, the official organizers, cited the need to accommodate the growing number of visitors, as the traditional route along Broadway was too constrained. Furthermore, the organizers argued that the fair site, Volunteer Park (located on Capitol Hill and closely associated with the gay community), was too small and lacked sufficient parking (Turnbull 2006). The move struck a chord with business owners on Capitol Hill, however, because the weekend-long event provided significant income to an already stressed market (Turnbull 2006, Turnbull 2007).

The move to downtown ignited a debate in the city as to whether the Pride festivities are to be aimed at the city's gay community or more mainstream Seattleites (Turnbull 2007). Supporters of the move argued that the community could seek greater acceptance by moving it to a location familiar to heterosexual residents. Opponents countered by pointing out that Capitol Hill was the center of Seattle's gay community and that the events were a celebration of their accomplishments. The move also highlighted the ongoing difficulties facing small businesses and gay bars in the Capitol Hill neighbourhood due to increasing gentrification and the pressures of development.

Late in November 2006, a weekly-alternative city newspaper, *The Stranger*, published an article titled “The Death of Pike/Pine,” describing the perils small businesses and gay bars find themselves in. Pike and Pine are two major streets in Capitol Hill that have a number of city’s gay bars, and are considered a major location for the queer community in the city.

Developers and real-estate agents love to talk about the “vibrancy” of the neighborhood like Pike/Pine. The website for the [recent condo development] Braeburn describes the neighborhood as “vibrant and diverse.” An ad for the Brix, which is going up at the north end of Broadway, calls the area “the neighborhood that shows Seattle how to have fun” (Barnett 2006).

“They’re pushing out what makes this the neighbourhood that it is,” says David Briggs, manager of the gay club Manray (Barnett 2006). At issue is the growing demand for housing in the neighbourhood and a flagging supply of space. According to the 1990 and 2000 census, the number of residents increased by 33%, and between 1997 and 2006, rent prices for a one-bedroom apartment have increased by over 50%. Constraints in the housing market have also translated into higher rental prices for retail spaces.

The neighbourhood is mixed-use, and if developers see an opportunity to capitalize on demands for housing, that means razing existing retail space in order to build additional housing and newer retail space in its place (Barnett 2006). In 2006, more antique retail space rent averaged \$15 to \$20 per square foot for rent, while for newer spaces the rent averaged about \$25 to \$40--a difference of 40% to 50%. The result has been a reduction of gay bars and an increase in retail shops like Kinko’s, tanning salons, and Walgreens (Barnett 2006, Brown *et al* 2011).

The issue of lost gay space on Capitol Hill was the center of a community discussion presented by a coalition of organisations in November

2008, ironically held in Seattle's Central District, which is adjacent to Capitol Hill. Participants discussed the pressures that development has had on specific gay sites and the broader impact of an increase in heterosexuals in the area. A common theme among speakers was the sense of community gained by the space and knowing that it was "normal" to kiss a person of the same sex on the street because everyone else was doing it. However the increase in development and visibility of heterosexual couples on the streets has made the space feel less inviting and more hostile toward gays. One participant even asked the question, "Where is the Queer community?"

In Seattle and Sydney, visible gay spaces, have increasingly become less gay—or as Ruting puts it, these spaces are "de-gaying" (2008). Both cities have seen gay spaces and events become increasingly heterosexualised as city boosters seek to market themselves as gay friendly to Florida's creative class. Several authors have noted similar changes occurring in other cities and some have even suggested that, as these neighbourhoods become less gay, queer folk are finding community online that eventually renders these physical spaces commodified versions of their past (Ruting 2008, Binnie 2004, Johnston & Longhurst 2010, Fraser 2007, Usher & Morrison 2010). In answering the question, "Where is the Queer community?" these authors might reply, "Online!"

A Displaced Gay Community Finds Itself Online

Many geographers who have explored the "de-gaying" phenomenon of gay neighbourhoods have also commented on the role that the Internet has played in this process. Binnie (2004) for instance has suggested that queers are finding a sense of community online and this perhaps means that gay bars are less needed by queers to meet one another. In discussing gentrification in Sydney, Ruting (2008) claims that use of the Internet by gay men, in part,

means that there is less of a need for the physical gay spaces of the Darlinghurst neighbourhood. The geographical literature discussing gay men's use of the Internet suggest that use of online spaces comes at the expense of gay physical spaces. Literatures from sociology and communication studies, which have examined gay men's use of the Internet in much greater detail, support these claims (Campbell 2004, Fraser 2007, Usher & Morrison 2010, Wakeford 2000, Gross 2003). In the following review of literature exploring gay men's use of the Internet, it will be demonstrated that these authors argue that online spaces used by gay men replicate in many respects the gay bar experience, and that these are preferable alternatives to the "de-gayng" physical spaces found in gay neighbourhoods.

Through an ethnography of gay subculture found in Inter-Relay Chat (IRC) rooms between 1997 and 2000, Campbell (2004) argues that men using these online spaces experience other bodies despite a lack of physical presence. A principle finding for Campbell (2004) is that users of these IRC rooms experience the bodies of other users through textual semiotics such as describing bodily features and sexual acts. Conversations in these online spaces were frequently about bodies of online users, and the text on the screen would often result in physical sensations for users as if these bodies online were real and material to the user. As these bodies come together online through IRC rooms, Campbell (2004) argues that offline constructions of gender and race are experienced. Users of the IRC rooms enact gender often through their online nicknames and how they describe their physical appearance by using words such as "large," "huge," and "big." In terms of race, Campbell (2004) found that most users assumed other users were white unless it was revealed otherwise. When one particular user revealed that he

was black, other users would attach images of black masculinity to the user. For the author, gender and racial stereotypes found in these online spaces are a reflection of offline realities found within the gay male subculture. Another reflection of offline communities found within these online spaces are gay bars. Campbell (2004) asserts that IRC rooms constitute “virtual gay bars” imitating in many ways their physical-world counterparts. In constructing these virtual gay bars through online space, Campbell (2004) argues that the users of IRC rooms create a sense of safety that helps to form a sense of community. Not only are the IRC rooms clearly identified as gay and gay space but users and moderators are proactive in kicking out abusers or gay bashers.

Fraser (2007) continues Campbell’s (2004) exploration of online spaces as safe spaces for Australian queer youth by examining the website Mogenic.com. Here, Fraser (2007) contends that physical spaces such as Sydney’s Oxford Street and Darlinghurst neighbourhood are not the nonconforming space that queer youth seek. Thus many lesbian, bisexual and gay Australian youth have gone online and specifically to the website Mogenic.com in search of that nonconforming, liberating space promised to queer folks. Yet, Fraser (2007) finds that the website incorporates a conformist image of the gay community by asking users to fill out a rigid membership form that leaves little room for expressing alternative identities. Fraser (2007) argues that even though these online spaces bring the public space of physical bars into the private space of the bedroom, they remain similarly conformist to a homo-normative image of the gay community.

Usher and Morrison (2010) re-enforce the notion that the gay community is in search of online space by arguing that gays and lesbians increasingly use online spaces to communicate with one another, and that

those communications deal less with the local community and more with the broader national or international gay community. For these authors, the gentrification pressures discussed by Fraser (2007) and other academics represent a loss of gay space in the city. At the same time online spaces have emerged and have provided the gay community an opportunity to change the spaces in which its members communicate with each other. Usher and Morrison (2010) argue that as the gay community moves from communicating in physical spaces to online spaces, information about the local community and local gay physical spaces diminishes. As evidence the authors surveyed advertisements and news articles found on the websites Gay.com and PlanetOut.com. Noting that there were few news articles or advertisements about the Los Angeles area gay community, they concluded that in these online spaces there is a disconnect between the local gay community and online users from that same locale. Usher and Morrison (2010) conclude that since gay men are able to communicate online and transmit cultural information regarding the broader community, physical spaces that used to facilitate this transmission of information are not as relevant as before. As gay men move online and become less attached to their local communities and gay neighbourhoods, these authors suggest that this represents a unique challenge for the gay community to adequately address the “de-gaying” phenomenon.

The literature reviewed in this section argues that users of online spaces come together in a very real sense, as pointed out by Campbell (2004), and create online communities. The communities created in these online spaces are a reflection of the physical communities that once occupied city streets. Unlike the local gay bar, however, these online communities are detached from the local communities in which users actually live. Even

though online users of these spaces may access these online spaces from specific locales, they enter these virtual spaces in search of a broader community not necessarily specific to their own neighbourhood or city. Based on this research, it is tempting to conclude that gay men are indeed moving their social interactions from the neighbourhood bar to their computers, but other research suggest that Internet use among gay men is much more complex.

Gay Community Uses Online Spaces to Build Local Offline Relationships

While some authors believe that the Internet is being used by the gay community to bypass gentrifying gay neighbourhoods in order to build a sense of community and belonging, other authors argue that gay men use the Internet to build knowledge of gay physical spaces and use these spaces in conjunction with the Internet to meet friends and romantic interests. The literature here describes how gay men who use the Internet to meet other men are particularly interested in meeting men who are in their local area. Their online activity does not replace their use of gay neighbourhoods and spaces. Finally, these gay men use online spaces to learn about their local gay neighbourhoods.

In 2005, Gudelunas examined the personal ad website PlanetOut.com and found that online advertisers generally wanted to remain rooted in their respective locales and expand their current social networks in offline physical communities. After surveying 200 personal ads, Gudelunas (2005) sent advertisers surveys. He/She found that all respondents were primarily searching for other users who were in the same or in nearby postal codes. Advertisements were examined and surveys sent to users from both small towns and big cities in the United States. It was found that online users were

not interested in moving from where they were currently living or changing their lifestyles, but rather sought others who lived near them and who shared common values and interest. Furthermore, users were not interested in maintaining communication with other users online, but rather were eager to move relationships offline quickly.

The work of Gudelunas (2005) shows that gay men and lesbian women use online personal advertisements as a means of connecting with a local community as opposed to a distant physical community or one that exists purely online. Murphy *et al* (2004) also explores gay men's use of the Internet, and argues that Australian men who use gay chat rooms also use gay bars and clubs at a comparable rate to the more general gay population. Murphy *et al* (2004) conducted a survey of gay identified men during major gay pride events in Sydney and Melbourne. At the same time, local community organisations executed their own survey at these events. While both surveys enquired about Internet use, Murphy *et al* (2004) explicitly recruited participants who had used gay chat websites, whereas the other surveys did not. The broader community surveys conducted in Sydney and Melbourne found that roughly 50% of respondents had used the Internet to search for sex partners, while in Murphy *et al* (2004) nearly 80% of men surveyed had use the Internet to search for sex partners. Despite the large gap between the two pools of data in terms of Internet use for searching for sex partners, there were virtually no differences in the percentage of respondents who also used gay bars and clubs to search for sex partners. Murphy *et al* (2004) reported that 68.5% of respondents said they used gay bars and clubs to search for sex partners whereas the community surveys found 69% in Melbourne who used gay bars and clubs to search for sex partners, and 66% in Sydney. While there is little difference in use of gay

bars and clubs, the surveys did indicate that users of gay chat websites may be less likely to use dance parties or beats to search for sex partners.

Murphy *et al* (2004) found that gay men use gay online spaces not in opposition to bars and clubs, but rather in conjunction with visible gay spaces. Further supporting this finding is the work of Sanders (2008), who conducted interviews of 21 men to investigate how gay men use and attach meaning to gay chat websites. Through online participant observation and interviews conducted both online and offline, Sanders (2008) found that men who use men-for-men online chat rooms use them for a variety of reasons. Some men used the online space to gain sexual knowledge about gay sex and common terminologies used among the gay community. For example: some men used these chat rooms to learn how to engage in anal sex while others learned about various fetishes such as jocks or bears. For the author, these characteristics are generally associated with those men who are recently out or new to gay sex. These chat rooms become an important resource to learning about gay sex and gay male culture. For other men, Sanders (2008) found that these online spaces offered opportunities to socialize and overcome the intimidation of physically going to gay-associated spaces. For some of those interviewed, these spaces were convenient to meet other men in a city they would soon be moving to or visiting. Yet for another group of participants, the chat rooms served as a convenient way to find sex or dating partners without spending the time getting involved with various gay organisations or going to bars or clubs. Lastly, Sanders (2008) found that for other men these online spaces served as a means to connect with the local gay-identified community. Men in either the city or the surrounding suburbs used the chat website to gain information about which bars to go to, which

bars had gay themed nights, and where were the best places to live in the city to be close to other gay men.

Through a reading of Sanders (2008), Murphy *et al* (2004), and Gudlundas (2005), it is evident that these authors view Internet use among gay men as a means of connecting online users with local users and local gay spaces and neighbourhoods. These readings counter the positions of Campbell (2004), Fraser (2007), and Usher and Morrison (2010), who argue that gay men's use of the Internet has resulted in their changing use of gay neighbourhoods. Sanders (2008) helps to complicate the literature, however, by demonstrating that users of these online spaces express various motivations and interests. While some of the men interviewed by Sanders (2008) used gay chat websites because it was easier than going to gay identified spaces, this was not a universal finding in the interviews. Furthermore, the work of Sanders (2008) confirms Murphy *et al's* (2004) finding that gay men who use the Internet continue to use gay bars to connect with the gay community. Taken together, the literature here questions those who argue that gay men are using the Internet to meet other gay men while leaving gay bars and neighbourhoods behind. The Internet has certainly provided new ways for gay men to meet one another. It appears, however, that gay men continue to use gay bars and neighbourhoods despite the "de-gaying" gentrification that has been observed by geographers.

Conclusion

Recently geographers have observed that gay neighbourhoods and events are "de-gaying" as they become tools for city economic development as opposed to spaces for sexual minorities. These changes to the cultural landscape of urban queer spaces have forced those in geography and in other disciplines to explore how sexual minorities who once dominated these spaces have

adapted. Some have suggested that the queer community has migrated to the Internet and used online spaces to meet others and build a social community that avoids use of local gay neighbourhoods. Yet, other researchers have found that gay men who use the Internet use it in order to strengthen local social networks and knowledge of local gay spaces and neighbourhoods.

In many respects, the literature on gay men's use of the Internet constructs a binary framework where, on one hand, Internet use takes gay men away from the local gay neighbourhood and on the other, Internet use connects gay men to their local gay neighbourhood. However, Sanders (2008) helps to complicate this narrative and suggest the variety of ways gay men use the Internet. As geographers continue to explore the "de-gaying" of gay neighbourhoods and how the Internet is contributing to this process, it is important to consider a fuller examination of how gay men use the Internet and online spaces. Earlier literature on Internet use by gay men explores online communities at a time when the technology available to access the Internet were spatially fixed. Users of these online spaces generally required a desktop, a modem, and a phone line. With this required infrastructure, users were fixed to specific places, such as their home, when accessing these online communities. In the few years between this early literature and this thesis, Internet access has become more mobile and decidedly less fixed to place. Today's Internet users don't require the same kind of infrastructure and can get online with only their phone and Internet access provided by their cell phone provider or Wi-Fi access, both widely available anywhere a user might be. As access to online spaces become less spatially fixed and accessible anywhere a user might be with their smart phone or other mobile device, online spaces such as Grindr complicate the intersection between virtual and physical spaces. In a time when men can turn on hand held

devices anywhere, anytime, and interact with other men near to their geographical location, geographers should ask how these men are using these services. How do these men engage with these mobile accessible online spaces? How do users of mobile accessible online spaces interact with the physical space where they are engaging these online spaces? What is the relationship between mobile accessible online space and physical space? Exploring these questions will help inform greater questions about the “de-gaying” neighbourhood and how the queer community is adapting.

Chapter 3: Methods

Introduction

A key aim of this project is to further explore the idea that the use of mobile online spaces is contributing to the decline of gay bars and clubs. Specifically, this project seeks to investigate how men are using these services, what type of interactions they are having, and whether or not these men also go to local gay bars and clubs. In order to pursue these questions, I utilized research methods well-established within the literature on men's use of online spaces in search of other men and gay men's use of online spaces. I have also consulted authors who explore how to conduct research within online social media. Ultimately, two research methods were chosen that not only provided substantive qualitative and quantitative data, but also allowed for a cross reference analysis that adds rigour to the research process and strengthens the research findings.

The two research methods selected for this project were a semi-structured interview and an online survey. A semi-structured interview was first chosen as a means to address the research questions in detail by engaging research participants in one-on-one conversations about their use of Grindr and local gay-identified physical places. In order to increase research participation and develop a second set of data for comparison, an online survey was chosen as a second research method. In reviewing the literature and previous studies, both a survey and an interview emerged as popular methods utilized by academics in conducting work not only on online spaces, but in ethnographic work in general (Campbell 2004, Murphy *et al* 2004, Stewart *et al* 2007, Sanders 2008, LeCompte *et al* 2010). In particular, the work of Murphy *et al* (2004) and Sanders (2008) proved to be most helpful in developing survey questions and an interview guide. The online

survey served as a critical way to advertise the research project and recruit interviewees for the semi-structured interview. Data collected during the semi-structured interviews underwent a grounded theoretical analysis followed by a cross-referencing exercise with the data collected during the online survey. It is important to note specific ethical concerns and limitations as part of this research such as geographical representation, self-selecting bias, and, in one case, payment made to a research participant for agreeing to be interviewed a second time after the failure of the recording device. Despite these challenges, the online survey and semi-structured interview worked well to address the research questions of this project.

Methodological Rationale

An imperative aim of this research project is to better understand users of mobile online gay-identified spaces. How do users use mobile online gay-identified spaces? Where are they when they use these services? What motivates them to use these online spaces when they do? What types of interactions are they having through these spaces? Because this project is addressing an implicit theory that online use by gay men is leading to a decline in gay bars and clubs, it is also critical to ask: do users frequent gay bars and clubs? Why or why not? How do users spend their social time? In what ways do they connect with the local gay community? The aims and research questions of this project demand greater detail than what a quantitative research method, such as a survey, can provide. At the same time, semi-structured interviews and other qualitative methods cannot reach and include a wide breadth of research participants. A multiple methods approach to social science research has been recognized by many researchers, in particular feminist researchers, as providing increased confidence or legitimacy to the findings of the study (Yllo 1988, Fine &

Gordon 1989, Jayaratne & Stewart 1991, Robinowitz & Weseen 1997, Tashakkori & Teddlie 2003, Stewart *et al* 2007, Gomez & Jones 2010)

In pursuing a multiple methods approach, I considered several qualitative and quantitative methods. I ultimately decided that an online survey, semi-structured interview, and a map marking activity would best suit the needs of my project. I first decided that a semi-structured interview would represent the best research method to address my research aims and questions because through this process, interviewees are able to provide explanations in their own words one on one. Specifically the semi-structured interview felt more like a conversation than a formal interview. A certain level of spontaneity was encouraged as I and interviewees diverged from proposed questions. This spontaneity invited a sense of equalization between myself as the researcher and interviewees as the participants, since I was able to share my own experiences with Grindr. Through the semi-structured interview, research participants were able and invited to offer their own explanations to questions such as: Do you know others who share your sexual orientation? If yes, how do you know them? How do you feel about going out to gay bars/clubs? How does Grindr impact your social life offline? What kind of relationships have you developed through Grindr? A one-on-one conversation centered on these questions not only allowed for reflective responses from participants, but also allowed me to ask follow-up questions and contextualize the responses provided. The semi-structured interview method provided me an opportunity to have a one-on-one dialogue with research participants in order to better understand how they used Grindr as a mobile online gay-identified space and how they also used local gay-identified physical spaces.

In addition to the semi-structured interview method, I decided to introduce a map-marking activity in order to further cement an understanding of the daily lives of interviewees. Using a map of the region and the city of Seattle, interviewees were asked to mark with a sticker where they lived, worked (or went to school), and spent their free time in a typical week. By asking participants to identify these three locations on a map, we can visualize their movement and the geographical places that are most predominant in their day-to-day lives. A key question in this project is whether or not Grindr users go to gay bars and clubs, and this activity helps us understand if research participants frequent gay bars, clubs, or other gay-identified spaces such as Capitol Hill in a typical week.

After deciding to use a semi-structured interview method and the map marking activity, I then choose to develop an online survey in order to reach and include a greater number of participants in the project. While surveys had been utilized in the past by other scholars within sexuality and health studies (Laumann *et al* 2004 and Murphy *et al* 2004), a survey in this case was well suited for the project's aim and questions because it provided demographic statistics and answers for direct questions such as whether users of mobile online gay-identified spaces also use local gay bars and clubs. As an online survey can be easily advertised, distributed, and taken by participants at their convenience, this method collects a significant amount of data that can be compared with data collected during the semi-structured interview. Statistics on participant demographics, use of local gay-identified physical spaces, and use of Grindr were important pieces of information to collect during the online survey, since they could later be compared with the qualitative data information gathered during the interviews. Through this comparative analysis the findings of the semi-structured interviews may be

reinforced or questioned. Although the online survey lacks the ability to fully address the research project's aims and questions, it serves as an important measuring tool in comparing the in-depth qualitative data gathered during the semi-structured interviews among a small number of participants with surface-level quantitative data gathered among a much larger number of participants.

Development of Methods and Implementation

This section is a discussion of the development of the specific research methods and how these methods were implemented in the field. The first two sub-sections outline specific objectives in designing the semi-structured interview guide and online survey. Although each method had its own different sets of specific questions and a very different approach, both were consistent in the types of questions asked in order to produce two sets of data that were comparable to each other. During the recruitment process, participants were first directed to the online survey, where they learned more about the project. At the end of the survey, they were recruited to take part in the semi-structured interview. Based on previous research, the specific methods developed and their implementation in the field best achieve the main aims and research questions of this project.

Semi-Structured Interview

Following the semi-structured interview method, as used by Sanders (2008) (also see Longhurst 2003, Gillham 2005, and Dunn 2005), an interview guide was developed to ensure that the interview addressed the main research aims and questions of the thesis and that interviews stayed within the parameters of the research question (see appendix C). As per the semi-structured interview method, the guide was not strictly adhered to, as there were follow-up questions, questions answered out of order, and questions that were not

applicable to individual participants. This approach allowed participants to share stories and elaborate as much as they liked on any particular question, with an overall goal of gaining a better sense of how participants incorporated the use of Grindr in their daily lives, understanding the kinds of personal relationships formed using the service, and determining what relationships users had to physical spaces in the Puget Sound area. Through these targeted topics, the interview guide was designed to address the key aims and research questions of this thesis.

The interview guide has four main sections that were designed to follow the sections found in the online survey to maintain consistency for cross reference purposes. The first two sections, Personal Background and Identity, are meant to collect more general demographic information from interviewees in order to compare this data with information collected from online survey respondents. If the majority of online respondents reported living in one neighbourhood while the majority of interviewees reported living outside that neighbourhood, such discrepancies would be important to note since they might decrease the likelihood that the two sets of data would be comparable using other criteria. The last question in the Identity section, “Do you know others who share your sexual orientation? If yes, how do you know them? Where do you find others who share your sexual orientation?” was designed to encourage interviewees to consider the places and/or situations in which they had met other men like themselves.

One of the research questions of this project asks whether or not Grindr users also go to local gay bars and clubs. Rather than assume that research participants are familiar with these spaces, the last question in the Identity section asks about their socialization practices without reference to gay-identified physical spaces. While the previous question was open ended,

questions in the next section were more specific to interviewees' use of gay spaces. Questions such as, "Do you go out to gay bars and clubs on Capitol Hill? If yes, where do you like to go and what is generally the purpose of going?" were designed to gain a better understanding of the incorporation of gay spaces into the lives of interviewees. In order to address remaining research questions, the last section was designed to gain insight into participants' use of Grindr and better understand how the mobile online space is a part of their everyday lives. Questions such as, "When did you start using Grindr? Why?" and "How does Grindr impact your social life offline? What kind of relationships have you developed through Grindr?" encouraged interviewees to discuss in as much detail as possible how they made use of the application.

In addition to understanding how Grindr and gay-identified physical spaces were made part of participants' everyday lives, the interview guide was also designed to gauge their use of other online spaces and to understand how participants compare between Grindr and gay bars and clubs. By asking interviewees about their use of other online spaces such as traditional websites and mobile applications similar to Grindr, we are able to contextualize participants' use of Grindr in conjunction with their use of other online spaces. By contextualizing use of Grindr with other online spaces, we can encourage a conversation that is specific about what makes Grindr appealing or not, and thus how Grindr is being used by participants. Additionally, it was important to ask interviewees to directly compare their preferences between Grindr and gay bars and clubs, since a key aim of this project is to address the claim that the use of online spaces by gay men is contributing to the decline of gay bars and clubs. Up until this point, the interview guide includes several questions that seek to address the research

questions developed as part of the central theme of this project. It has yet to directly ask about the key assumption inherent in the claim this project is based on, however. In the penultimate question, “Do you prefer to meet men on Grindr as opposed to gay bars/clubs?” the interview guide addresses this key assumption. If gay bars and clubs are in decline because of gay men’s use of online spaces, then it is assumed that gay bars and clubs serve a limited role that is easily replicated through online space. Asking participants to identify their preference between Grindr and gay bars and clubs is asking them to indicate if the two in fact provide them with the same experience or not.

Online Survey

The online survey developed for this project closely follows the themes of the interview guide. It was modeled on the work of Murphy *et al* (2004), which shared similar project aims in understanding how men used online spaces to meet other men. As stated before, consistency between the two methods was critical in order to provide two sets of comparable data. The questions developed for the survey were designed to directly inform the aims and research questions of this project by asking respondents their demographic information, participation in the local gay-identified community, and their use of Grindr and other online spaces (see appendix A for survey questions and responses). Considering its design and use of Murphy *et al* (2004) as a model, this survey represents an effective way to address and inform the key research questions identified for this project.

The work of Murphy *et al* (2004) represents a strong model for the development of this survey because key questions identified in that project closely follow the ones identified in this project. Murphy *et al* ask; “How do gay men use chat sites? How often do they use them? What else is the

Internet used for? Do Internet sex-seekers prefer chat sites to other ways of meeting men?" (2004). Although these questions focus specifically on the sex practices of men who use online spaces, there remains a common theme between Murphy *et al* (2004) and this project. Both projects seek to better understand and contextualize men's use of online spaces in relation to other spaces available where men can meet other men. Despite the authors' specific focus on men's sex-seeking practices online and lack of focus on the use of gay-identified physical spaces, the survey used in Murphy *et al's* (2004) study is a strong building block for the survey developed for this research project.

For this project, the survey that was developed consisted of three main sections: demographic information, use of local gay-identified physical spaces, and use of Grindr and other gay-identified online spaces.

Demographic information included questions related to an individual's age, the zip code in which they lived, income group that best represented them, gender identity, and sexual orientation. This type of information was important to collect to note any particular trends that might suggest bias in the results. Additionally, the survey was designed to assume that Grindr was not exclusive to those who identified as male and gay, so respondents were asked to identify their gender sexual orientation. The next two sections focused on survey respondents' use of local gay-identified spaces and Grindr and other online spaces. In order to address specific research questions within these sections, a series of survey questions were developed so that a general theme could be identified and conclusions could be confirmed and supported by responses to several questions. For example, a key question for this project is whether Grindr users go to gay bars and clubs. In order to address this question, multiple questions were developed for the survey that

essentially get at answering this key question. As part of this approach, approximately half of the survey questions in these two sections asked participants to evaluate statements as opposed to answering a direct question. For example, one direct question asks, “What have you used Grindr for?” Respondents are able to choose from a list of possible answers that apply. Later in the survey, respondents are asked to evaluate the statement, “Most men I meet face to face on Grindr become friends I keep in touch with on a regular basis” by indicating that they strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, or that they have not met someone face to face whom they first met on Grindr. Using responses to both of these questions and others, we can begin to identify certain trends in the survey that helps us address key aims of this research project and the identified research questions of how men are using Grindr, what types of interactions they are having, and whether these men also go to local gay bars and clubs.

Recruitment/Implementation

The target audience for this project were those 18 and older who used Grindr and lived in the survey area (defined as the boundaries of the PSRC in Puget Sound Regional Council 2011). In order to reach out to this audience, a variety of recruitment strategies were utilized that were, in part, informed by my “insider status” being a gay man who was from the Seattle area. Having grown up, gone to school, and lived in the Seattle area, I had a specific knowledge and access to certain LGBTQ communities that were made part of my recruitment strategies. Additionally, I had several personal friends through Facebook whom I was able to recruit. All strategies involved a brief explanation of the project and directed all potential participants to an online survey using the University of Washington’s Catalyst survey program. Broadly speaking, there were three primary strategies to recruiting

participants. One involved advertisements through posters, the second invited participants to take the survey via email and the social networking website Facebook, and the third was a snowball approach asking interview participants and my own acquaintances to forward information to their own friends.

In implementing the poster strategy, an 8 x 11-inch poster was designed. The poster contained a brief explanation of the project, requirements for participating, contact information for the researcher and supervisor, and the survey web address. The posters were placed in bars and clubs, coffee houses, and community centers serving gay men in Seattle's gay-identified neighbourhood Capitol Hill. Outside Capitol Hill, posters were placed in gay-identified bars and clubs in the Seattle neighbourhood of Wallingford, and in the suburbs of Kent and Tacoma. Posters were also placed in the Diversity Resource Center (DRC) at the University of Washington Tacoma and at the Rainbow Center, an LGBT community center, in downtown Tacoma. In total, about 35 posters were distributed around the research area.

The second strategy used a prepared text to invite participants to take the online survey. The text described the project, requirements for participating, contact information for the researcher and supervisor, and a link to the survey web address. This standard message was sent to several different audiences through a variety of ways including email messages to LGBTQ topical listservs, snowball sampling through email forwarding by interview participants and community leaders, and the creation of an event page through the social networking website Facebook. While this represents a diversity of recruitment strategies, a single common text was used throughout the recruitment process.

I also sent recruitment emails to LGBTQ listservs within the research area. A popular listserv utilized in this process was CampusQ, whose audience is primarily those affiliated with the University of Washington (UW). The UW hosts a number of LGBTQ organisations, and has three campuses within the research area, with a total student population of over 50,000 (University of Washington 2011). Other LGBTQ organisations with listservs were also sent recruitment emails. In most instances, I was a member of these listservs, and could therefore send messages without approval by a list moderator. In addition to LGBTQ organisations affiliated with the UW, other groups were contacted. I investigated LGBTQ groups at other four-year institutions and community colleges in the Puget Sound region, and then contacted leaders of these organisations asking if they could post the standard email, which was included in the original email, to their organizational listservs or other means they had to contact members. Groups from Seattle University, Everett Community College, Green River Community College, and Seattle Central Community College responded positively. Beyond organisations within higher education, social groups were also contacted and asked if they could post the standard email message to their listservs. Groups like Seattle Quake, a rugby organization for gay men, responded positively, while the majority of groups that I contacted did not respond.

A number of social organisations and individuals within the Puget Sound region received the recruitment email through a snowball sample approach. Most interview participants expressed enthusiasm for the project and a willingness to assist in recruitment. At the conclusion of all of the interviews conducted in person, I asked the participant if they were willing to forward the standard email message to other friends or listservs to which they

belonged. All participants agreed and shortly after the interview the researcher forwarded participants a copy of the standard email message. Through this approach, social groups from running clubs to employment-based affinity clubs (such as the LGBTQ group at Microsoft) were forwarded the standard recruitment email. Since I was not carbon copied (CC'ed) on emails sent to these groups, their involvement cannot be verified; however, some interviewees indicated they first heard about the survey through one of these listservs, suggesting that emails were indeed forwarded. The snowballing method was also used in contacting LGBTQ community leaders known by the researcher. Originally, the researcher hoped to have community leaders forward the standard recruitment email to organizational members such as the Pride Foundation (a local non-profit focused on serving the LGBTQ community). In discussing dissemination possibilities with these community leaders, it was determined that a snowball method would work best out of concern that members would become fatigued by emails not directly pertaining to the organisations. The standard recruitment email was forwarded to these leaders, who then forwarded the e mail to friends and other contacts from their personal email accounts. Even though the standard recruitment message was not sent *en masse* to members of several Puget Sound area LGBTQ organisations, an indeterminate number of individuals received personal emails from friends encouraging them to visit the survey website.

After four weeks of implementing these strategies, the return of surveys was low and, in order to boost survey responses, an event page was created on the social networking website Facebook. The Facebook event page represents another approach to the snowball recruitment method, as I initially invited personal friends to the event and asked those friends to invite

friends they thought might be interested. In addition to using the Facebook event page to recruit through direct invitations, I also posted the event on the wall of Facebook groups such as Gay People in Seattle (GPiS). In total, 137 individuals received an invitation through this method. Although the survey did not ask respondents how they heard about the project, this effort seems to have been fruitful, as a large number of surveys were completed within the first 48 hours of the creation of the Facebook event page.

Use of the Internet (i.e., email listservs) and more traditional recruitment methods (i.e., posters in a bar) represents a mixed approach in recruitment efforts, and is informed by the work of Murphy *et al* (2004). In their discussion of recruitment using the Internet, the authors concluded that a mixed approach was best since there was conflicting evidence as to whether or not recruitment through the Internet yielded differing results from those recruited through more traditional means (see also Ross *et al* 2000, Mustanski 2001, Rhodes *et al* 2002, Reid *et al* 2002). To follow the recommendations of Murphy *et al* (2004) this project should have recruited participants in person. Yet Sanders (2008) and Joinson (1999) point out that there is a certain stigma associated with using the Internet to meet other men. With this understanding, it was deemed inappropriate to recruit participants in person, since such efforts may have alienated potential participants and caused undue stress. Furthermore, because of this associated stigma, it was decided not to recruit participants using Grindr by sending them messages through the service and asking if they would be interested in participating in the survey and interview. It is possible that for some men, use of these online spaces is an exceptional moment in their usual activities, and a message from a researcher might disrupt the experience of the space and likewise cause undue stress. Finally, it should be noted that

Sanders (2008) used the snowball sampling method in order to recruit participants, which complements the mixed methods used by Murphy *et al* (2004).

Once participants were successfully recruited using the above methods, they were directed to the survey website, where they learned more about the project by reading the consent form. They then took the survey. At the end of the survey, they were recruited to take part in the semi-structured interview. Participants were asked if they were interested in taking part in a follow up interview with the researcher. If they declined, they were directed to the end of the survey. An affirmative answer sent them to another page, which asked participants to provide some form of contact information such as email address, phone number, or user name from specific websites or instant messaging services (such as MSN or AIM). After survey respondents submitted their responses and contact information I followed up with either a standard text message or a phone call.

Potential interviewees were given the option to have the interview conducted in-person at a location of their choosing, over the phone, email, or online chat. Most interviewees choose to be interviewed in person; however, two interviewees decided to be interviewed through email. Meho (2006) has reviewed various ways to conduct interviews including interviews via email and has concluded that data received through email interviews were nearly as reliable as data gathered through in-person interviews (see also Binik *et al* 1999, Mustanski 2001, Hancock *et al* 2004). Additionally, previous studies of gay men's use of cyberspaces (Campbell 2004, Gudelunas 2005, and Sanders 2008) heavily relied on interviews not conducted in person. Those interviewed through email were sent the interview guide and asked to respond to the questions it contained. I reviewed the responses and provided

interviewees with follow up questions. The majority of interviewees choose to meet in-person at a place of their choosing. Usually this was at a café, restaurant, or bar near the participant's workplace or home. One participant requested that the interview take place in a private meeting space at a local library. It was unclear if the participant chose this location for privacy or convenience. Most participants were comfortable discussing their social lives and use of Grindr in public settings. One notable exception, however, was when one participant requested that the researcher refer to Grindr as "the program" during the interview, which took place at a Starbucks in a major area shopping mall.

Each in-person interview began with greetings and brief small talk before directly going through the interview process. The interview started with a brief explanation of the project and a review of the interview consent form. Interviewees were given a copy of the interview consent form to read and sign. Most participants agreed to have their interview audio recorded however one participant did not.

Once the interview consent form was reviewed and filled out, the interview began. The four main sections of the interview guide were identified for the participant and the length of time to complete each section was noted. In keeping with the semi-structured interview process, participants were encouraged to elaborate on any questions or experiences as they wished. Interviews lasted between an hour and an hour and a half, and always ended with the researcher asking participants if they had any additional information to add and if they were interested in inviting people they know to take the survey.

Immediately following the interview, the audio recording was transferred to my laptop. The file was titled with the identification number

pre-assigned to the participant and placed in a password-protected folder. Transcription of interviews took place weeks later in the fall of 2011. In the case of one face-to-face interview where the participant did not consent to being audio recorded, I took careful notes and transcribed the interview immediately afterwards in as much detail as possible. This process followed the interview guide and provided answers for each of the questions in the guide according to the responses by the participant as noted by the researcher.

The semi-structured interview was used by Sanders (2008) in both online and face-to-face interviews. Sanders (2008) notes criticism of conducting interviews online. However, other scholars find that the online format is useful in reaching marginalized groups (Binik *et al* 1999, Mustanski 2001), and that deception by online participants is no greater than deception found among face-to-face participants (Hancock *et al* 2004). Furthermore, Sanders (2008) and Joinson (1999) believe that there is a certain stigma associated with men who use the Internet to search and meet other men. With this understanding, it was decided that potential interview participants may experience this particular stigma and, if so, may be reluctant to meet in person. Without the option of conducting the interview online, these potential participants may not even consider participating at all. Murphy *et al* (2004) also argues that when interviews are conducted online participants may feel less social anxiety. Yet the authors also caution that since being online reduces inhibition, there is a risk of participants not being completely truthful (Joinson 1999). Again, Sanders (2008) has argued that the potential for participants to not be truthful is not much greater than face-to-face interviews. The benefits of conducting interviews online seem to outweigh potential negatives.

During the semi-structured interview, I introduced a map marking activity mid-way through the process. After discussing interviewees' use of physical spaces in the city and their socializing activities with other gay or non-heterosexual men, I asked participants to note on a map where they lived, where they worked, and where they spent their free time in a typical week. On a single sheet of paper (8 x 14 inches), there were two maps. One side consisted of a map of the Puget Sound region and the entire research area. The other side had a map of the city of Seattle. In order to make note of the locations asked for, participants were provided coloured star stickers; gold for home, green for work, and silver for social time during a typical week. Due to the scale of the maps, size of the stickers, and the likelihood that most participants would need to place stickers within the city of Seattle, a more detailed map of Seattle was provided. Although the activity was helpful to better understanding where interviewees generally spent most of their time, there was not enough spatial information to draw significant conclusions.

Data Analysis

Two forms of data analysis were used in this project. First, data from the survey was examined using the Catalyst survey system in which the online survey was developed. The system was able to provide simple statistics for each question and provided raw answers in an Excel spreadsheet. While the simple statistics indicated the percentage share received by each answer, the raw data allowed the researcher to explore certain participants more closely in order to see if there were any common or unique characteristics. For example, if 15% of respondents indicated that they had not met someone face to face who they first met on Grindr, their responses to other questions were explored to see if these particular participants shared any

commonalities such as being fairly new to Grindr. The second set of data from the interviews was analyzed using grounded theory as adopted by Strauss *et al* (1998) and modified by Charmaz (2006). First, using open coding, the transcripts from the interviews were broken down into simple concepts and ideas. Second, relationships among the simple concepts identified were established and related concepts grouped together through axial coding. Broad themes that emerged through this process were then checked with the original transcripts to ensure consistency. Finally, selective coding was used to create a narrative from the broad themes.

Cairns *et al* (2010) argue that grounded theory as developed by Glaser *et al* (1967) and later modified by Strauss *et al* (1998) is one of the few ways that researchers can best analyze social computing and virtual communities. While the authors note that critical theory and content analysis are also analytical tools used in studying online spaces, they argue that grounded theory is best used to analyze interview transcripts or field notes. Understanding this to be the case, Sanders (2008) applied grounded theory in the analysis of interview transcripts. Sanders (2008) adopted the interpretive approach as described by Charmaz (2006), however. This approach differs from Strauss *et al* (1998) in that a focused coding procedure is used after the open coding process. There is also constant checking with the original transcripts to ensure that the themes that emerged through the coding process are indeed found in the original transcripts.

Ethical Considerations

During the data collection process, certain ethical considerations arose that need to be mentioned to ensure integrity to the process and the report's conclusions. A key issue here was maintaining confidentiality of research participants. As noted earlier, previous research has suggested that men who

use online spaces in search of other men may feel a certain stigma for engaging in these activities. This concern was validated when one interviewee asked that I not say “Grindr” during our interview while at a public café. In order to respect this concern and ensure that personal identifying information of research participants remained confidential, I developed an ID tracking system that linked identifying information to a unique ID number, I gave participants the option to provide alternative forms of contact information, and interviewees had the opportunity to refuse consent to being audio recorded.

In order to keep track of data gathered for each participant, a four digit unique identification number was assigned to each survey respondent who provided contact information. The identification number was generated by the online based survey program used. When a survey respondent completed the survey, the program would assign that unique participant a seven digit identification number. I then used the last four digits of this number to assign those survey respondents who provided contact information. This four digit number became a unique identification number. This number was then placed on all notes, maps, and audio recordings gathered for each interviewee. For example, “participant A” in the survey would be randomly assigned the number 7538632. If “participant A” also provided contact information, the last four digits, 8632, were then assigned to the unique user and their contact information (i.e., the email address, participant.a@hotmail.com, would be assigned ID number 8632). Any data resulting from “participant A” was then attributed to ID number 8632. This system was developed in order to ensure participant anonymity and to limit the reproduction of any identifying information.

Although most respondents provided at least an email address and some included a phone number, one survey participant provided their user ID to a popular dating website for gay men and asked to be contacted via the website. At the time, I also had a profile on the same website; however, out of confidentiality concerns and to maintain a sense of professionalism to the project, I decided to create another profile on this website in order to contact the participant.

Before each interview (whether conducted through email or in person), I went through the consent form with the interviewee. For interviews conducted over email, the participant returned the consent form electronically with their name typed instead of a signature, as was obtained from those interviewed in person. For those interviewed in person, most consented to having their interview audio recorded. One interviewee, however, did not consent to having their interview recorded. In lieu of an audio recording, I took detailed notes during the interview. Shortly after the interview, I recorded myself going through the interview guide and recalling the participant's responses.

An additional ethical consideration that is important to cite is the payment I made to one interviewee for his participation in the project. Due to a complication with the recording device, the first interview with this participant was not recorded. I contacted that interviewee shortly after the first interview and asked if he would be willing to do a second interview with a different recording device. Although no other interviewees were compensated for their time, this particular interviewee was promised and provided with a Starbucks gift card (a \$15 value) as a thank you for their willingness to be interviewed twice.

Study Limitations/Problems in Gathering Data

Certain limitations within the study are important to disclose in order to ensure that the findings of this study are seen within their context. Although these issues do not undermine the study's conclusions, there is a relation to the quality and relevancy of the data. Issues such as geographical representation, self-selecting bias, difficulties in outreach, and interviews conducted over email are not unique challenges when conducting social research. In disclosing these limitations, I hope to add transparency and rigour to this study.

Geographical Representation

Despite efforts to attain a geographically diverse set of responses, most survey and interview participants were from Seattle as opposed to other parts of the research area, thus providing a limited geographical representation of Puget Sound area Grindr users. With nearly 71% of survey respondents and 65% of interviewees reporting a Seattle zip code, it is probable that Seattle is over represented in the survey. According to the PSRC, Seattle only represents 16.5% of the survey area's population (Puget Sound Regional Council 2011b). It is possible that a disproportionate percentage of Grindr users in the survey area actually do live in Seattle, but it is beyond the scope of this project to determine where Grindr users live.

The apparently disproportionate numbers are most likely due to recruitment methods, which were focused heavily in Seattle. The majority of posters were placed in Seattle establishments mainly because of the lack of LGBTQ-identified spaces outside Seattle. Though there are a number of LGBTQ organisations in the Puget Sound region serving communities outside Seattle, contact with organisations in general was difficult to establish, which thus made recruitment outside Seattle a particular challenge.

In addition to these difficulties, snowball sampling through my personal friends and Facebook also created a bias in the geographical representation of those recruited for the project.

Self-Selecting Bias

Although multiple strategies were used to reach out to survey participants including posters, email communications through GLBTQ organisations, and snowballing, the sample only represents those who either received a direct invitation to take the survey or who happened to be at a gay-identified venue. This suggests that it was likely that participants were comfortable with their sexual identity because they were associated in some way with non-heterosexual persons and places. Additionally, it is likely that respondents had a strong interest in Grindr, since there was a relatively high barrier, particularly for those who learned of the survey through the posters, in order to participate. Without someone asking them in person to take a survey, those in the sample pool were able to choose if the survey was worth their time without feeling pressured by having someone there in front of them. For those who heard of the survey from the posters, they had to take note of the web address and then later manually enter in the address into their web browser in order to take the survey. Due to the recruitment practices used in this project, survey participants were more likely to be publicly open with their sexual identity and intensely interested in Grindr. This probably excluded those Grindr users who are not publically open with their sexuality, those who are not involved with gay or LGBTQ-identified organisations and places, Grindr users who do not have other gay male friends, and those who do not use Grindr that often and don't think too much about it.

Difficulties in Outreach

Several Puget Sound area LGBT community organisations were contacted and asked to help advertise the project. Originally, the hope was that these organisations would be willing to include information about the survey in a regular member newsletter or mass email. However, most organisations either did not respond or were unable to assist. Some organisations were very sympathetic to the project and, despite their policies against sharing messages from third parties, individuals within these groups took it upon themselves to share information with their personal contacts within and outside their group. In addition to issues of internal policies of LGBTQ groups, most of these organisations were primarily based in Seattle, with few being focused in other parts of the area. In particular, it was difficult to recruit from Pierce and Snohomish counties in part due to the lack of LGBTQ organisations identified. Also, there were few LGBTQ-identified venues such as bars and clubs in these areas, with notable exceptions in Tacoma and Kent.

Emailed Interview Responses

Two of the fourteen interviews conducted for this project were done via email, as opposed to in-person interviews completed for all other participants. In order to gain as many interviewees as possible, it was decided to keep interview platforms as flexible as possible for interested participants. Sanders (2008) and Meho (2006) both concluded that interviews conducted via email were nearly as accurate as those conducted in-person and that results from these interviews just as valid as those conducted in person. Additionally, much of the previous field work on gay men who use online spaces has been conducted through an online medium, either through messaging services or email. Although follow up emails were sent to

interviewees, it is clear in the transcripts that in-person interviews yielded more colourful and insightful responses from participants. Interviews conducted via e mail did help to solidify certain themes set by in-person interviews, but did not suggest their own unique findings.

Conclusion

In reviewing previous studies that explored men's use of online spaces and, in particular, studies of uses of online spaces by gay men, this project used a variety of research methods and recruitment strategies in order to conduct fieldwork. A key aim of this project is to better understand the daily lives of Grindr users and specifically how they use the application, what types of interactions they have on Grindr, and whether or not these users also go to local gay bars and clubs. As such, a single research approach seemed inconsistent with the overall goals and specific research questions of the project. The survey approach used by Murphy *et al* (2004) and the semi-structured interview approach used by Sanders (2008) appeared to complement each other. Data from the survey provided generalities of the 62 valid respondents, while the 14 semi-structured interviews gave an opportunity to explore the lives of these Grindr users in greater depth. Although there were difficulties in the recruitment process, as well as technical challenges, the research methods and strategies conducted for this project were multi-layered and provide an opportunity to better understand the daily lives of Grindr users.

Chapter 4: Grindr By The Numbers

Introduction

A key finding identified in this chapter is the wide variety of avenues taken by survey respondents attempting to connect with other men. Instead of relying solely on online mobile applications, gay bars, or bathhouses, research participants reported with near universality that they employed multiple ways of finding other men for friendship, sex, and romance. Although Grindr was a popular way to meet other men, most respondents did not feel that it was an important way for them to meet other men, and in fact preferred meeting men in local gay bars and clubs. In referring back to the research questions identified in chapter two, these initial findings indicate that Grindr users use the application as part of a cornucopia approach to meeting other men, with Grindr being the less preferred option over other opportunities such as gay bars and traditional online websites. Another research question asked was whether or not Grindr users go to gay bars and clubs. These survey findings not only indicate that Grindr users go to gay bars and clubs, but in fact prefer to meet other men in these venues instead of using the online mobile application (see appendix A for survey questions and responses). Through these findings, we can begin to sketch out answers to our research questions.

The first research method used in this project was a survey of Puget Sound area Grindr users that assessed their identities, personal background information, social life, connection with local gay identified spaces, and use of Grindr. With a validity rate of over 95% (of the 65 responses received 62 were valid), these results suggest that these Puget Sound area Grindr users are “out” gay men who embrace gay identity and frequently include gay bars/clubs and the gay-identified neighbourhood of Capitol Hill in their free time. Additionally, these men used Grindr in a multi-purpose fashion

whether they were “just looking” or hoping to meet other men in-person. For these Grindr users, the smart phone application does not represent a significant way to connect with the local gay community.

Survey Respondent Background Information

Identities

With the makers of Grindr advertising the application as a program where you can “find gay, bi, curious guys for free near you” (Grindr 2012), the producers instantly ascribe certain sexual identities onto their users. Here, they make it clear that Grindr is predominantly a program meant for men who identify themselves in some way as gay or bisexual. Yet Judith Butler (1990) informs us that identities surrounding sexual orientation and gender are not given constructs, but rather proscribed and retained through everyday actions. Keeping Butler in mind, the survey asked participants to identify their gender and sexual orientation with a number of options available. Although the vast majority of respondents identified themselves as gay men, a small number of respondents identified with categories outside “gay,” “bi,” and “male.”

When respondents were asked to identify their sex, they overwhelmingly (88.7%) chose male over other options listed, including the option “other.” Roughly 8% identified as queer, 1.6% noted their identity as FTM (Female-to-male), and one selected other, writing in “Queer/Transsexual/Male”. Even though multiple identities were represented in the survey, the vast majority of respondents identified themselves as male.

Survey participants were also asked to identify their sexual orientation, and 83.6% listed themselves as “gay”. While a gay identity was not shared universally, it is clearly the dominant identity shared among most respondents. In cross referencing responses to these questions, 75.8% of

respondents identified themselves as gay men. While not every respondent identified their sexual orientation as “gay,” no one selected “straight” and identified themselves as heterosexual.

Given the recruitment methods employed in this project, these results may come as no surprise. Recruitment was heavily focused on gay-identified venues, organisations, and individuals. Although this may not be an accurate representation of the broader Grindr community of users, this survey does suggest that Grindr users are heavily composed of gay identified men. The survey results also suggest that Grindr is not used exclusively by those who identify as gay men, since a handful of respondents indicated their sex as other than male and indicated sexual identities ranging from queer to bi. Although no one in this survey identified as heterosexual, previous studies (Murphy *et al* 2004, Gudelunas 2005, and Sanders 2008) strongly suggest that heterosexual-identified men use online spaces like Grindr that are popular among gay-identified men. Thus, it is likely that heterosexual men use Grindr, but were not part of the survey sample. It is difficult for this survey to be definitive in understanding a majority of Grindr users due to its sample size and recruitment methods. The survey does suggest, however, that Grindr is an online space predominantly used by self-identified gay men.

General Demographic Information

In order to establish a survey participant’s eligibility to participate in the project, the first two questions of the survey focused on their age and place of residence. Eligibility meant that respondents were of 18 years of age or older and lived within the boundaries of the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC). In determining the age of participants, it was critical that the survey program automatically recognized someone 17 years old or younger in order to ensure that the study was only conducted among adults (18+). Thus, the

survey provided age group options to respondents as opposed to asking respondents to enter their exact age. Anyone who selected “Under 18” was automatically sent to the end of the survey. Unfortunately, this also meant that it was difficult to break down responses by age outside of the pre-selected age groups. One missed opportunity was the possibility of looking at how those who reported an age between 18 and 20 differed in their use of Grindr compared to those 21 years and older who can legally enter bars and clubs that serve alcohol. Even though a median or mean age cannot be established for survey respondents, it appears that participants were generally fairly young, since nearly 30% reported being between the ages of 25 and 31, and just over a quarter said that they were between the ages of 18 and 24. Respondents tended to be concentrated between the ages of 18 and 31; however, a little less than half of respondents were between the ages of 32 and 59. In the older age groups, there seems to be a larger spread of respondents, with most concentrated between the ages of 32 and 45. These results suggest that Grindr users in the Puget Sound region tend to be in their twenties or thirties.

Survey respondents were also asked to provide their residential zip code in order to establish that they live within the study’s geographical boundaries. Of the 65 total survey responses received, only 2 surveys did not meet this criterion, as they reported zip codes outside the PSRC. With the disqualification of another participant for other reasons, the remaining 62 respondents represented a wide diversity of locations in the Puget Sound region.

Respondents reported zip codes from rural locations such as Snohomish, suburban localities such as Federal Way and urban areas such as the Rainier Valley neighbourhood in Seattle. Though a variety of locations

were represented by participants, most (70.97%) reported zip codes within Seattle proper, while the rest reported zip codes from across the region. For those outside Seattle, most reported a zip code from within King County (the most populous of the four counties within the PSRC) and in particular in cities east of Lake Washington (commonly referred to as “the eastside”), such as Bellevue, Redmond, and Issaquah. Few reported a zip code in the southern part of the county, which tends to also be more populated and have lower reported family incomes (Morrill 2011). Less than half of respondents from outside Seattle reported zip codes from Pierce County (to the south) and Snohomish County (to the north), representing just over 12% of all respondents. Though these counties represent a significant portion of the PSRC’s population, these areas seem underrepresented in the survey. It is certainly possible that there is a higher concentration of Grindr users in Seattle and King County. This discrepancy could also be the result of recruitment practices that focused on gay venues and organisations that tended to be primarily based in Seattle.

The majority of respondents reported a zip code from Seattle proper. Since zip codes can cross city and neighbourhood boundaries, it cannot be determined exactly where participants were from, but we can gather a general sense of the locations throughout the city and region. The majority of respondents from Seattle reported zip codes in the generally more affluent north end of the city, while few respondents reported a zip code in the southern end of the city, including the neighbourhood of West Seattle. It may have been expected that most respondents would have reported a zip code near the Capitol Hill neighbourhood, due to its high concentration of gay residents (Brown *et al* 2011, Turnbull *et al* 2011). Yet, only about one-third of Seattle respondents reported living in or near this neighbourhood.

Based on these results, respondents primarily came from Seattle, but not necessarily from Seattle's identified "gay" neighbourhood. Respondents represented a variety of locations in the study region, from urban to suburban; however, they tended to concentrate in the more affluent areas of Seattle and the eastside.

Although respondents tended to concentrate from wealthier neighbourhoods of the Puget Sound area, it seems that income levels were diverse and fairly spread out between high and low income earners. Surprisingly, those earning over \$100,000 per year made up nearly a quarter of all respondents, followed by those who made between \$15,000 and \$30,000 a year. Even though the largest income group was also the wealthiest, those who reported an annual income of up to \$60,000 per year made up just over 40% of all respondents. Full-time students and those who were unemployed, traditionally groups with limited income, represented nearly 20% of all respondents. Finally, those earning over \$60,000 a year represent fewer than 40% of participants. These numbers show that it is likely that participants are making less than \$60,000 a year, that those with limited income are not excluded from using Grindr, and that a large percentage of Grindr users are making above the median income in King County (\$66,400 (Puget Sound Regional Council 2011c)). Though the question of income does not relate to eligibility requirements, it does address issues related to the accessibility of Grindr. Even though Grindr is only accessible through a smart phone or iPod device, which can be costly and requires Internet access through wireless Internet or mobile Internet networks, these numbers show that a significant percentage of participants still use Grindr despite having limited incomes. Nonetheless, the majority of respondents appear to be reporting incomes in

which they could comfortably afford the technology Internet required to use Grindr.

Grindr is often referred to as a dating or “hook up” program where men go to find other men to date or have sex with (Moses 2010, Kapp 2011, Thomas 2011). In this last question exploring the backgrounds of survey participants, relationship statuses are examined. Exactly 50% of respondents reported being single, whereas the other half reported being in some type of relationship. Most respondents who reported being in a relationship were more likely to report being in a long-term relationship than dating. Three respondents, representing nearly 5% of the total, cited other and either noted being in a long-term open relationship or registered domestic partnership. Due to Grindr’s reputation, it is somewhat surprising that half of respondents reported being in a relationship of some type. Later in the survey, just over 50% of respondents indicated that they were looking for casual sex, and a slightly higher percentage said that they had found casual sex. This suggests that a high percentage of participants are using Grindr while being in a relationship and not necessarily looking for sex, which counters Grindr’s general reputation as an application used by those looking for dates or a “hook up.”

Out and Proud Both On and Offline

A previous study into men in search of other men through online spaces have suggested that the level of anonymity found in this space is a significant draw for those who may not be comfortable with their sexuality or who do not share a gay identity and only seek men for sex (Rhodes 2004). Earlier it was discussed that about 75% of respondents identify themselves as gay men, and no one indicated that they identified as heterosexual. Clearly, participants of this survey identify themselves as gay and are probably less likely to be simply

looking for sex, as will be discussed later on. Therefore it was important to find out how open and comfortable survey respondents were with their sexuality in order to analyze whether or not this might be a factor in their use of Grindr. Overwhelmingly, participants said that they were comfortable with their sexuality publicly, with 72.6% strongly disagreeing with the statement, “I am concerned that someone I know from work/school may see me at a gay bar/club,” and another 21% disagreeing. Only a few participants agreed, suggesting that they may not be comfortable or open about their sexuality. Overall, it seems that these Grindr users are open about being gay men offline.

Survey respondents also do not seem to shy away from a being open about themselves online either. When asked to evaluate the following statement: “In order to remain anonymous on Grindr I do not post a picture of my face and/or include any identifying information in my profile,” Nearly 50% strongly disagreed and an additional 27.42% disagreed. This suggests that only a small minority of participants do not feel comfortable sharing information on Grindr. Though more respondents reported being comfortable with their sexuality offline than online, the differences are minimal, and the vast majority are open with their sexuality and identifying themselves both online and offline.

Time Spent with Other Gay Men and in Gay Places

As discussed in the literature review, popular media and some academics have suggested that due to the rise of the use of the Internet and online spaces by gay men, gay physical spaces have declined in popularity among gay men in general, thus causing the decline of the “gaybourhood” (Ruting 2008, Johnston *et al* 2010, Usher *et al* 2010). While it is beyond the scope of this project to determine whether or not this thesis is correct, it is possible to

begin constructing an image of the lives of those men who use these online spaces, especially as experienced through a mobile medium like Grindr. The survey asked respondents to evaluate multiple questions that sought to gauge the amount of time spent with other gay men and non-heterosexual individuals, and where they prefer to spend their time socializing. In reviewing the answers to these questions, trends emerged showing that, in general, survey respondents spend a good deal of their social time with other gay and non-heterosexual men, and prefer to socialize in non-heterosexual places.

Time With Friends

The majority of participants in the survey reported having all or most gay/queer/bi/non-heterosexual male friends. When asked, “How many of your male friends identify as gay/queer/bi/non-heterosexual?” over 60% of respondents indicated that all or most of their male friends identified as non-heterosexual, with 56.45% saying most and 6.45% saying all. Just over a quarter said some of their male friends were gay/non-heterosexual and only 11.29% said that just a few were. These responses suggest that Grindr users in this survey were very likely to have several male friends who shared their sexual orientation. It suggests that, overall, these respondents lead lives that involve their sexual orientation outside the bedroom. With the majority of respondents reporting that most or all of their male friends identify as something other than heterosexual, it suggests that Grindr users in the Puget Sound area are more likely to have several non-heterosexual male friends, and will possibly identify as being part of a broader community.

As the lives of survey respondents are explored further, it is also important to understand how much of their free time is spent with gay/queer/bi/non-heterosexual men as opposed to just how many non-

heterosexual friends participants have. When asked, “How much of your free time is spent with gay/queer/bi/non-heterosexual men?” over 80% of respondents said a lot or some and no respondents answered none. More specifically, 46.77% of all respondents replied a lot and 37.10% indicated some. With such a high frequency of responses for a lot or some, answers to this question seem to suggest once again that respondents are connected with other non-heterosexual men in their daily lives. It is particularly interesting how few respondents indicated a little or none of their free time was spent with non-heterosexual men. This suggests that respondents do spend a significant amount of their free time with non-heterosexual men.

From these observations of the data, it seems that the majority of respondents have a great deal of gay/non-heterosexual friends and that they spend a reasonable amount of their free time with them and other gay/non-heterosexual men. Given that this study is motivated to understand where Grindr users spend their free time and how Grindr is a part of their daily lives, it is critical to gain a sense of where survey participants spend their free time, and what brings them there. The following sections evaluate the survey questions that explore these issues, and suggest that respondents view Seattle’s Capitol Hill neighbourhood as the city’s “gaybourhood,” yet do not necessarily privilege this area over others. It also suggests that respondents have a strong preference for attending gay-oriented venues, specifically on Capitol Hill, and that a nearly universal reason provided for attending gay bars/clubs was to spend time with friends.

Capitol Hill and Its Significance as a Gay Place

Throughout popular media and academic literature, there is a strong association between gay identity and Seattle’s Capitol Hill neighbourhood (Atkins 2003, Reuter 2008, Brown *et al* 2011, Turnbull *et al* 2011). From

census data to significant cultural locations, Capitol Hill is broadly believed to be Seattle's gay neighbourhood. Based on survey responses, participants agree with this commonly held notion. Additionally, respondents demonstrate a preference for Capitol Hill as a location in which to spend their free time and go out to gay venues.

For survey participants, there is a strong belief that Capitol Hill is Seattle's gay neighbourhood, as 61.29% strongly agreed with the statement in the survey and 33.87% agreed. Yet, respondents didn't agree that it was the only neighbourhood in the Puget Sound area in which they could feel comfortable with their sexuality. Over 75% of participants disagreed in some way with the statement, "Capitol Hill is the only Puget Sound area neighbourhood where I feel comfortable being openly gay/queer/bi/non-heterosexual." While there seems to be a stronger belief that Capitol Hill is Seattle's gay neighbourhood, the majority of respondents report feeling comfortable with their sexuality in neighbourhoods outside Capitol Hill. Responses here seem to suggest that Capitol Hill, in particular, is connected to a gay identity and it is considered the premier neighbourhood for area gay residents.

Throughout the survey, Capitol Hill emerged as a preferred location for respondents to spend at least some of their free time and for going out to bars or clubs. In a series of statements, participants evaluated their preferences for either going to straight oriented bars and clubs or gay bars and clubs on or off Capitol Hill. Over 80% of respondents indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I prefer going to gay bars/clubs on Capitol Hill" while an equal percentage disagreed with a similar statement about gay bars/clubs outside Capitol Hill. Furthermore, when respondents were given a list of Puget Sound areas known by the

researcher to have gay bars/clubs, over 90% said that they preferred going to Capitol Hill, while no other single location received more than 10%.

Participants were also asked whether or not they preferred straight or mixed bars/clubs either on or outside Capitol Hill. Over 80% disagreed with the statement, "I prefer going to straight or mixed (straight, gay, bi) bars/clubs on Capitol Hill," while about 75% disagreed with the same statement regarding locations outside Capitol Hill. These results suggest that about 20% of respondents prefer straight or mixed bars/clubs on or off Capitol Hill while a strong majority prefer gay bars/clubs specifically on Capitol Hill. While participants may feel comfortable with their sexuality in other Puget Sound neighbourhoods, what might set Capitol Hill apart and make it the premiere neighbourhood for gay men is the fact that it is the preferred destination when going out to bars/clubs.

In terms of the amount of time survey respondents spend on Capitol Hill and at gay venues and events, which are presumably on Capitol Hill, results seem to suggest that while a reasonable amount of free time is spent in the neighbourhood, perhaps not a lot of time is spent going out to gay bars/clubs. When asked to identify how frequently they attended gay venues and events including gay bars/clubs, bathhouses, and gay organisations and clubs, half of participants reported going less than once a week, and one-third indicated going once or twice a week. Respondents were also asked to share how much of their free time is spent on Capitol Hill in general and half reported either a lot or some of their free time, followed by 42% who said that a little of their free time was spent in the Seattle neighbourhood. In particular, it is interesting to note that every participant reported spending a part of their free time in the area.

Though respondents report having a preference for gay bars and clubs on Capitol Hill, results here seem to suggest that it is not common for them to go to these places on a weekly basis. At the same time, most respondents report spending a lot or some of their free time on Capitol Hill, while 42% say they spend a little of their free time in the neighbourhood. This would suggest that perhaps survey participants are spending a reasonable amount of their time on Capitol Hill, but not necessarily always at gay bars/clubs. Overall, results from the survey show that for these Seattle area Grindr users, Capitol Hill is a significant neighbourhood in part due to the presence of gay bars/clubs, and that this area is important for spending one's free time.

Capitol Hill Gay Bars and Clubs as Places to Hang Out with Friends

Some authors have argued that gay bars and clubs once served as important meeting spaces for gay men, but that as these men increasingly use online spaces to meet other men, gay bars and clubs suffer under the weight of new competition (Ruting 2008, Usher *et al* 2010, Thomas 2011). These claims beg the question: Why do men go to gay bars and clubs in the first place? Survey results seem to suggest that the primary motivator for these Grindr users is to enjoy time with other friends as opposed to meeting other gay men. While respondents report meeting new men at gay bars and clubs, in general, they do not believe these are important places where they meet other men, nor are they places in which they are particularly looking to meet them.

Respondents were about evenly split when asked to evaluate the statement, "Going to gay bars/clubs is an important way for me to meet other gay men in the Seattle area," with 49.18% saying that they disagreed with the statement while another 6.56% indicated that they strongly disagreed. Those selecting disagree or strongly disagree for this statement represent about 55% of respondents and about 45% indicated agree or strongly agree, which

shows no clear overall preference. While gay bars/clubs seem important for many survey respondents, the majority of them do not find these venues to be significant places to meet other gay men in the Seattle area.

From a list of possible motivations, respondents were asked to select all those that were reasons why they went to gay bars/clubs. The vast majority of respondents selected “To have fun with friends,” at 83.87%. No other option received more than 50%, demonstrating this option as a near-universal reason why participants go to gay bars and clubs when they do. Respondents also indicated that they went to gay bars and clubs to “Meet other men for friendship” (46.77%) and “For the music” (41.94%). Not all respondents reported going to gay bars or clubs at all, since about 11% exclusively selected this option. Based on these results, participants are overwhelmingly motivated to go to gay bars and clubs primarily with friends and to be social with those they already know.

Meeting other gay men at gay bars and clubs may not be the primary reason why respondents go to these venues in the first place. They do, however, report meeting other men for either friendship or sex. Over 75% of survey participants reported finding new friends at gay bars and clubs, followed by 63.79% who reported finding a casual sex partner. Although just over 6% of total participants did not reply to this question, it can be deduced from the data that a majority of those surveyed have met other gay men in these venues and have had varying kinds of relationships with these men.

Through results revealed from this survey, these Seattle area Grindr users seem primarily motivated to go out to gay bars and clubs to be social with other men they already know. Even though these places may not be seen as important to meet other gay men in the Seattle area, respondents seem to

indicate that they still meet other gay men in these spaces, whether for a relationship or for sex.

Grindr as a Casual Social Medium

Data from the survey suggests that for these Seattle area Grindr users, the program in many ways is used casually in seeking and finding a diverse set of experiences. Some men find sex, more find friendships, and others find chat buddies. The term “casual” refers to the nature of relationships sought and found on Grindr. It also refers, however, to the places that users engage with the application (i.e., turn it on) and the level of importance survey respondents ascribe the program. Users also reported a preference for other means of interacting with gay men such as other smart phone applications, online websites, bars/clubs, and so forth. Overall, this smart phone application appears to play a small role in the lives of these Puget Sound area Grindr users. In contrast to the stereotypes and images put forward by popular media and academics, online spaces constitute one of many avenues men use to meet and engage with other gay men.

Finding a Diverse Set of Experiences

Most survey respondents reported first using Grindr because they had friends who were using it and were curious about it. When asked, “Why did you first start using Grindr? (Check all that apply),” nearly 65% of respondents reported “My friends were using it/talking about it,” followed by 48.39% who thought that it might be a good way to get to know new people, and 35.48% who thought it would be an easy way to cruise for sex. Other listed options received less than a quarter of respondents. In particular it is worth noting that less than 5% of participants cited a disinterest in gay bars/clubs as a reason for starting to use Grindr. Rather than negative experiences with gay bars and clubs, respondents seem to be suggesting that the fact their friends

were using Grindr was the primary influence over their motivation to start using it. The possibility of meeting other men for sex or for other means was certainly a consideration, but friends talking about Grindr seemed a more compelling motivation.

Once respondents began using Grindr, most had a variety of experiences with other men, including exchanging messages, new friendships, sex and relationships. When asked, “What have you used Grindr for? (Check all that apply),” a strong majority of respondents selected “Just looking/surfing” (87.10%) and “Chat” (77.42%). These selections are followed by “Meet men for casual sex” (56.45%) and “Meet men for a possible relationship” (46.77%). Over 65% of respondents reported that they were seeking to chat through Grindr, followed by 63.93% looking for friends, 59.02% wanting to meet other men, and 55.74% looking for casual sex partners. When asked to describe the type of relationships developed with others through Grindr, almost 60% said chat buddies, and 57.63% said casual sex partners and new friends. Through these questions, the survey suggests that it is most common for participants to be more interested in simply experiencing casual conversation and chatting with other Grindr users. Yet, it is only slightly less common to be interested and to find casual sex partners or friends.

It was a rare occurrence for a single participant to note in the survey that they only looked for one type of relationship on Grindr, or that they only had one type of experience through the application. Nearly every respondent reported that they were interested in having a variety of experiences through Grindr, and that many did have numerous experiences. The Puget Sound area Grindr users represented in this survey not only demonstrate a diversity of experiences sought and found through Grindr as a group, but also as

individuals. One respondent may have been seeking someone to chat with but also someone to have sex with or to date, while another respondent may have met both a boyfriend and a casual sex partner. For these men, Grindr is a multi-functional application that provides them the ability to do several things, whether looking for a sex partner, passing the time through chatting, or staying connected with friends.

Given the variety of relationships that survey respondents developed using Grindr and the various experiences that they had, it is not surprising that a large majority have met individuals in person whom they first met through Grindr. Through a series of questions, roughly 20%-25% of respondents had not met someone in person whom they first met through Grindr. Those who met men in person generally did not do so in the first few weeks of using the application, and only met 1-5 men in the past 6 months. These numbers suggest that when survey respondents do meet men in person whom they first met on Grindr, they are averaging less than one man per month, and do not seem particularly eager to meet someone as soon as they start using the program. When respondents do meet men through Grindr, it is often for a variety of reasons from casual sex, friendship, or dating. This may reinforce the idea that Grindr is primarily utilized as a program to chat with others. Though meeting people for sex or friendship is not out of the question, it just may not happen that frequently.

Casual use of Grindr cannot only be found in the types of relationships or experiences participants have but also in their physical use of the program, such as when and where they use it. When respondents were asked to indicate how often they use Grindr, only about 30% indicated that they log on every day, whereas just under 70% use it at least once a week, and 30% are accessing it less than once a week. When participants do sign

into Grindr, they access it from a number of places. The home seems to be the universal place where nearly all respondents (95.16%) reported using Grindr, followed by cafes (62.90%), in other cities (58.06%), on public transit (56.45%), at work (54.84%), walking (53.23%), and while out at gay bars/clubs (51.61%). Taken together, these responses seem to describe not only infrequent use of the application, since the majority of respondent's only use it a few times a week, but also accessing the program from a variety of locations when they do use it. Although the home was clearly the most common single place where participants accessed the program, other common locations were mobile or transitory places such as public transit, walking, or being out and about at cafes or gay bars/clubs. Based on these results, participants don't use Grindr every day, but rather every so often throughout the week. When they do, it is common that they are doing something else at the same time such as walking, having coffee, working, or being social with friends at gay bars and clubs.

In surveying the results to these questions, it seems clear that, for these Puget Sound area Grindr users, their experiences in using the program have been generally casual in nature. Respondents didn't begin using the program in search of a certain experience, but rather more out of curiosity. Once they started using Grindr, it was more common for participants to be browsing, chatting, or passing the time than actually meeting other men in person for sex, friendship, or dating. Respondents also do not appear to use the program on a daily basis, but rather a few times throughout the week from a number of places while engaging with other activities. For these users, Grindr is a multi-purpose application often used while multi-tasking.

Grindr: One of Many Avenues

In the previous section, it was suggested that survey participants use and experience Grindr casually and gain different types of experiences, using it infrequently and in many locations. This section will examine other places and spaces where survey respondents meet other gay men in the Puget Sound area. Through the survey, participants suggest that Grindr is not a universally important way to meet other men in the area. Rather, there is a preference for meeting men in other spaces, such as gay bars and clubs, online websites, friends of friends, and work. What begins to emerge in the survey is an understanding that Grindr is one of many avenues or tools used by participants to meet other gay men.

Survey respondents generally had a mixed response when asked if they thought Grindr was an important way for them to meet other gay men in the Seattle area. Though 55.74% said that Grindr is not important to meeting other gay men, a large minority said that it is important. For those who said it is important, their enthusiasm was limited, since only a few suggested that it is very important. This lack of importance may be related to an overall dissatisfaction with Grindr, as roughly half of respondents reported not being satisfied with their experience. Additional investigation suggests, however, that there is simply a preference for using other means to meet other men.

When asked to list other ways in which they meet other gay men in the Puget Sound area, respondents indicated several methods. Over half of respondents indicated “Friends of friends” (82.26%), followed by “Internet websites” (75.81%), “Gay bars/clubs” (69.35%), and “Private house parties” (50.00%). Only two respondents reported using Grindr exclusively when seeking other gay men, which suggests that for nearly every respondent, multiple strategies were used to meet other men. Among these Seattle area

Grindr users, it was very common to find other gay men among friends of friends, Internet websites, and gay bars and clubs. Use of gay bars and clubs by these men were explored earlier and, despite not going to these venues frequently or going for the purpose of looking to meet new people, gay bars/clubs are surprisingly significant places where respondents meet other gay men.

Among the top strategies used by respondents were other online spaces, since 75.81% reported using Internet websites, and one-third said they used other smart phone applications. In a separate question, respondents were asked specifically if they used gay chat/dating websites (such as www.adam4adam.com, www.manhunt.net, www.squirt.org, and so on) to meet other gay men. Just over 70% said yes to this question, which is slightly less than the 75.81% who said Internet websites were another way they met other men. This not only confirms that a majority of respondents use Internet websites to meet other men, but it also suggests that it is highly common among these specific Grindr users to use other online spaces not found on mobile devices. Respondents also reported using other smart phone applications such as Scruff (35.71%), Manhunt (33.93%) or Jack'd (19.64%). Although only one-third of respondents indicated that they used other smart phone applications, when asked specifically what other applications did they use, a majority of participants noted another program besides Grindr. This might suggest that they have used these other applications in the past but when it comes to actually meeting other men, perhaps only one-third are successful on other applications. Overall, these numbers do show that these Grindr users are commonly using multiple online spaces such as gay chat/dating websites and other gay smart phone applications to meet other men.

In considering a preference for Grindr over other avenues or strategies for meeting gay men, respondents seem to prefer alternatives to the smart phone application. Respondents were asked to evaluate a number of statements, which determine whether or not Grindr has fulfilled a specific purpose for them. Results show that participants continue to search for sex partners, friends, and dates elsewhere even after using Grindr. The vast majority of respondents strongly disagreed with statements such as, “Since I started using Grindr I no longer look for casual sexual partners (one time or on a regular basis) elsewhere,” or, “Since I started using Grindr I no longer look for boyfriends/lovers elsewhere.” While roughly 20% agreed that they do not look for sex partners elsewhere, well over 90% disagreed that they don’t look for significant others or friends elsewhere. When asked specifically if they preferred to meet men through Grindr or Internet chat websites, there was a preference for Internet websites. It was not a strong preference, however, with 55% disagreeing and 11.67% strongly disagreeing. There was a clearer preference for gay venues such as gay bars/clubs, bathhouses, and gay organisations/groups. When presented with the statement, “I prefer meeting men through Grindr than through gay venues (such as gay bars/clubs, bathhouses, gay organisations/groups),” 56.45% disagreed and 20.97% strongly disagreed. These survey results show that for these Puget Sound area Grindr users, Grindr is not the preferred avenue for meeting other gay men in the area. In fact, using other online spaces and gay venues such as bars and clubs are generally greatly preferred.

Conclusion

Results from this survey indicate that users of the online space found on Grindr are generally “out” gay men who identify with the broader Seattle area gay community and use Grindr as a multi-functional application while

going about their daily lives. These findings appear to be in contrast with voices from popular media that decry smart phone applications such as Grindr as the demise of gay bars and clubs. While it is beyond the scope of this study to determine the true impact that technology use among gay men is having with their use of gay bars and clubs, the survey here seems to suggest that men who do use Grindr continue to go to gay bars and clubs and overall seek out gay spaces. For these Seattle area Grindr users, the Capitol Hill neighbourhood is seen as a unique space in the city for the gay community, and no matter where these men may live in the Puget Sound region, they continue to spend at least some of their free time in this locality. Rather than “replacing the traditional gay bar,” these Grindr users suggest that for them, Grindr is a way to pass the time. Grindr users may occasionally find someone interesting through the application, but continue to seek other ways to meet other gay men through friends, other online spaces, or even gay bars and clubs.

One of the key themes of this thesis is to explore the notion that online chat rooms, websites, and other online spaces are directly contributing to the demise of gay bars and clubs. The findings of this survey not only challenge this assumption, but also begin to shed light onto the dynamic incorporation of online spaces by users. While there is a clear indication that Grindr users also go out to gay bars and clubs, answers to other research questions remain unclear. How are these men using these services? What types of interactions are they having? Although the survey suggest that Grindr users are using the application in a variety of places and forming a diversity of relationships, the survey does not give us any indication as to why.

This survey is far from conclusive as to how Grindr users interact with the application and gay-identified physical spaces. Nonetheless, it does offer

an opportunity to begin to understand how emerging technology is used, and helps us understand the men who incorporate it. Since a survey only provides a snapshot of these men, interviews of some survey respondents will shed further light on what the survey results may be telling us and better illustrate how Grindr is incorporated into their lives. As location-based technology continues to grow in popularity, it becomes increasingly more important to understand how we use this technology in our everyday lives. Better understanding this will allow geographers and society at large to begin to understand how use of this technology may relate to our relationship with places and spaces.

Chapter 5: Grindr Interviews

Introduction

It's always like when we first get there [Capitol Hill] we'll log in and then we'll kind of log in off and on throughout the night, see who has arrived and who, and then all my favourites, you know, I am looking to see. I am always looking to see, oh, are my friends in the area, 'Oh, that's my friend from Tacoma,' and maybe they are like, a mile from me, that means they are in Seattle and they were on 20 minutes ago so they are here somewhere. So then maybe I'll get on my text messages and I'll text my friend and I'll be like, 'Are you in Seattle? I just saw you were online.' Sorta keeping tabs on my friends (Harry, 29, Interview).

The above quote highlights a key finding identified through the semi-structured interview process following the online survey: place matters. Using Grindr, Harry is able to negotiate Capitol Hill, Seattle's gay neighbourhood as he looks to "see" which of his friends might be nearby and possibly make plans. Although Grindr can be used to negotiate space anywhere, Harry and other interviewees say that Grindr is particularly useful in other gay-identified spaces such as gay bars and clubs or in a neighbourhood. Harry's quote also touches on two other themes identified through the semi-structured interview process, convenience and efficiency. Even though Harry is out on Capitol Hill doing other things, Grindr is convenient for him to use because it is on his smart phone. Additionally, Harry is able to use his time more efficiently, since Grindr will show him who of his friends may be nearby so that he can text them directly. In this chapter the themes of convenience, efficiency, and negotiation will be further explored. Ultimately, these themes provide greater insight into the original research questions, and suggest that interviewees use Grindr differently according to their location in place and time.

This chapter is primarily written around individual quotes provided by interviewees. As these are meant to reflect personal experiences, the context from which those experiences emerge should also be understood. Those who participated in the interviews brought with them a diverse range of backgrounds in terms of age, socio-economics, and geography. The average age of interviewees was 31, with one being as young as 20 and the oldest being 51 years old. Most of those interviewed were fully employed within retail, technology, social, or health services. Three interviewees were students either at a community college or a local four-year university, and two reported being unemployed. Most participants reported that they were originally from the Puget Sound area, or that they had spent a great deal of their adult life in the region. Some also reported being fairly recent transplants to the area, however, coming from places such as Italy, California, and Chile. Finally, most participants reported living in Seattle (64%). Only three of the nine Seattle residents reported living on Capitol Hill. Outside Seattle, two reported living in south King County, two reported living in Tacoma, and one identified rural Snohomish County as his place of residence. Despite slight differences, interview participants generally reflected those who took the online survey in terms of demographic information.

Also in line with survey respondents, interviewees reported having several gay male friends and going out to gay bars and clubs at least a few times a month, if not once a week. For many participants, going out to gay bars and clubs was usually a Friday or Saturday night event, and often done with friends. Other participants reported going out to gay bars and clubs more or less frequently, however, usually because of their home location or interest in “the bar scene.” A vocal minority of interviewees expressed

disappointment in the Seattle area “gay scene,” often citing low quality bars and clubs and the apparent disinterest of patrons to engage with strangers. Often those who expressed a negative sentiment toward gay bars and clubs in the Seattle area were not from the region, and despite their views continued to go to gay bars and clubs as frequently, if not more so, than those who had a positive view. Finally, when asked if they preferred to meet men through Grindr or other online mediums over bars and clubs, most interviewees reported that they preferred meeting other men through bars and clubs.

Overall, interview participants seem to generally reflect those who took the online survey and represent a strong sampling of respondents. Interviewees tend to be younger, gay-identified men who have full time (and generally well paying) jobs, and who spend a reasonable amount of their social time with other gay men, often on Capitol Hill. Despite differences in experiences, interviewees generally expressed having a lifestyle that was consistently mobile, and devices like smart phones were conveniently suited to address their needs.

Convenience

In the course of the interviews, participants discussed how they found Grindr to be convenient mainly because it was readily accessible to them through their small, handheld smart phones. Due to the portability of the device and application, interviewees were able to multitask, entertain themselves when they were bored, and more easily find sex when they wanted it. The following quotes elaborate these points and demonstrate a sense of convenience when using Grindr.

I use my iPhone to go on a lot of the dating sites that I use, even though a lot of them can be accessed through the computer. It's just easier for me to sit and watch TV and be on my iPhone as opposed to going into my office. When I am in my office on my computer, that is

my main focus. If I have the TV on, it's off to the side. That becomes the background noise. Whereas if I am in the living room, I have a big screen TV, so that tends to be the focus, with the iPhone being more of the supplementary focus (Chad, 42, interview).

Chad reported that his iPhone is his preferred way of accessing the Internet from home, even though he has a traditional desktop computer. For him, his iPhone is convenient because it is small enough for him to multitask, particularly at home. Rather than sit in front of his desktop computer going through dating websites, he can do the same thing sitting on his couch while watching TV and using his iPhone. Another example of multitasking with a smart phone comes from A.K.A, who said he uses his phone to access Grindr when he is with other people: "If I am at my friend's mom's house, you know, and she's talking about the same war stories that I've heard a hundred times now... I'll get on Grindr" (A.K.A, 23, Interview).

In this quote from A.K.A, he explains that he uses Grindr when he is disinterested in the environment he is in, in this case while visiting his friend's mother. Later in the interview, he explains that since he is using his phone, he is able to access Grindr discretely while he is with her in person. Because of the size and portability of his smart phone, he was able to conveniently multitask with his phone and use Grindr, while at the same time keeping his friend's mother company.

The disinterest expressed by A.K.A in his surrounding environment is similar to the boredom that many interview participants discussed when using Grindr. Yet, what makes boredom different from disinterest is the sense that there is nothing else to do in the present situation. Since Grindr is accessible through smart phones, it becomes a convenient way to be entertained with little effort on the part of the user. As one participant noted, sometimes the choice for entertainment was either playing a video game or going on Grindr.

For Raymond, Grindr can be an opportunity to do something when he has a restless night and cannot go back to bed. He does not want to get out of bed, he is not interested in watching TV, and he is too tired to read or do anything else. However, with his iPhone nearby, he will opt to see who is on Grindr.

A lot of times its at 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning. I've already gone to sleep and I'll wake up and I am just lying there and I am too tired to do anything else. I don't really watch TV and I don't want to read because it I am just too tired to do anything else. I'll just turn it on and look at it to see who's on there at that time (Raymond, 51, interview).

Use of Grindr during moments of boredom is not just found late at night, but throughout the day for participants. Michael, for example, says that he logs into Grindr from home, while on a city bus, at work, or, "Basically when I am bored, I'll log on, so anywhere, actually" (Michael, 20, interview). Shawn further elaborates by saying,

I mean, I chat with people there when I am bored. It's a really good way to just chat with people instead of playing games. I can just get on Grindr and be like, "Hey, what's up?" without any intentions (Shawn, 26, interview).

As one participant said, boredom and "feeling horny" go hand-in-hand. Although Grindr was not used exclusively to search for sex, many participants reported using the application when they were feeling aroused and wanted to find sex immediately. For these participants, the convenience of their smart phones and access to Grindr thus made the prospect of sex that much more of a possibility.

When asked what he is usually looking for on Grindr, Michael, a 20 year old gay man from south King County, reported having some favourite profiles saved, and that he will sometimes engage his favourites in conversation if they are online. Of his favourites, some are previous "hookups" (men he has met on Grindr whom he has met in person for sex),

chat buddies whom he has never met in person, or friends he knows from outside Grindr. He goes on to say,

Other than that, I basically just look for guys around me, cuz I usually look at Grindr at sometimes like, one or two o'clock in the morning, cuz it's like, I am getting horny so it's like I'll look for guys who are up and see if they want to mess around. Other than that, I just kinda look at like, I just look at the guys that are in the area cuz maybe one day I'll see them and be like, "Oh yeah," you know, maybe make a new friend or something (Michael, 20, interview).

In this quote, Michael says that he uses Grindr for a variety of reasons, including looking for sex when it's late at night and he is feeling aroused. Simultaneously, he is also looking at the profiles and pictures of other users in his area and, though he may not be successful in finding a sexual partner, he is familiarizing himself with people around him that he might later see in person.

Chad also reports using Grindr to look for sex, even though he cited a preference for more traditional websites. However, the advantage he claims Grindr has over traditional websites is that he is more likely to find what he is looking for more quickly on Grindr, as opposed to more traditional alternatives. He says,

I think Grindr is useful, but it's more of an immediate thing, is how I look at it. It's more of a, they're online now, I am online now, if it's going to happen, it's going to happen now. Whereas the other websites, it's not so necessarily immediate. You can talk for a while, you can exchange information, it's not like it has to happen now or you'll probably never see them again (Chad, 42, interview).

Chad further states his belief that, because Grindr has provided him with the means to connect with others within his area who also might be looking for sex, he is having more sex than he had prior to using Grindr. He adds, "Now, there are times when getting a date is as easy as ordering a pizza" (Chad, 42, interview).

Finally, Raymond is another interviewee who reported using Grindr to find sex immediately. He says that sex is not his main interest when he chats; however, other users will occasionally approach him for sex. Similar to what Chad reported earlier, Raymond will sometimes agree to have sex simply because it is quick, easy, and convenient. Due to Raymond's home location near downtown Seattle, he often sees other Grindr users near him who are from out of town. The transient nature of Grindr users most available to Raymond is in part what makes meeting for sex easier, since he feels that anything resembling a relationship is out of the question. Yet, the immediacy of meeting someone presented through Grindr makes sex that much more convenient.

For Raymond and other interviewees discussed in this section, Grindr is a convenient application to multitask, to be entertained, and to find sex immediately. What makes Grindr particularly convenient to meet these ends is not necessarily the application, but rather the device users employ to access it. Since the smart phone is small and portable, users are able to access online mediums in a variety of places and situations where they are not easily able to do so with other devices, such as a laptop or desktop computer. With their smart phones, they are able to multitask and engage with their surroundings while using the application. The convenience of using the Internet on smart phones has been commented on by several authors, including de Souza e Silva (2006), Daliot-Bul (2007), Hearn (2008), Bittman *et al* (2009), Goggin (2009), and Mowlabocus (2010). Additionally, users are able to easily access their phones, and therefore the application, during periods of boredom, perhaps in the middle of the night when they would rather stay in bed than trudge to a distant computer screen. Finally, sex is often made more readily available through Grindr, in large part because users are already using their

phone and the application out of boredom. As Chad says, “It’s more of a, they’re online now, I am online now, if it’s going to happen, it’s going to happen now” (Chad, 42, interview).

Efficiency

The convenience expressed by participants related predominantly to the accessibility and portability of their smart phones, whereas efficiency related to how they feel Grindr helps them manage their time. Those interviewed reported using Grindr frequently as a way to pass the time or fill in the gaps throughout their day. When interviewees reported using Grindr, particularly during these “in-between” moments, they were usually checking messages, wondering if they had favourites who were online or nearby, or were looking through the profiles of other users. Participants also noted that while profiles on Grindr only provided a limited amount of information about a user, it was enough information for them to quickly determine if the individual user was “worth their time.” The limited amount of information also made participants feel more comfortable contacting other users, since it did not give them high expectations about possible outcomes. In using Grindr, participants often felt that they were being efficient with their time, whether it was keeping busy on the bus ride home or avoiding a conversation that would go nowhere.

For the majority of interviewees, Grindr was a way to pass the time or fill in gaps throughout their day. Often this resulted in using Grindr while in transit (taking the bus or during a car trip), while waiting for friends to arrive, or during breaks from work. Several interviewees said that using Grindr was synonymous with checking their email, Facebook, and other smart phone applications that involved being connected with people.

Harry, for example, discusses when and where he usually signs into Grindr. Here, he details using the application as a way to “kill time” while waiting for something to happen, either for a friend to arrive or for him to arrive at his destination.

Whenever I have down time, whenever I want to kill time. I’ve taken the train and bus to work a few times—I was doing it for about a week. If I wasn’t sleeping, I’d usually log in. Like I said, kind of like the road trip story, we’re traveling up the tracks and I am curious who’s gonna message me in Federal Way, who am I going to see online in different areas of town. Usually it’s like travelling around. I am usually not sitting in one spot. If I was sitting at this coffee shop waiting for somebody, I would have logged in for sure. I would have first checked my emails. Like, I have a priority, I first check my text messages, my emails, and then I move on to the program, and that would be last resort. Like, I am not really interested in chatting, but if nothing else, I’ll find someone to chat with (Harry, 29, Interview).¹

Beyond these “in-between” moments when interviewees would use Grindr, participants also reported using the application as a “little distraction” from their other day-to-day activities. Raymond elaborates on this point and discusses using Grindr while he is at a coffee shop reading a book or otherwise lounging. It is important to note that this is not Raymond’s exclusive use of Grindr, but rather an example of when he might use the application.

I sign in all the time. If I was sitting here reading a book, I would check it. But the thing is, is that I sign in and check it, but I don’t stay on there long. I just go on for a few minutes and then sign out. If I am here for another hour and I get distracted, I turn it on again. Because it’s like a little distraction. Then, if there’s a message I might answer it, but if I am busy or it’s in the middle of the day doing something else, I don’t want to get sucked into this chatting because it’s just going to waste my time (Raymond, 51, Interview).

¹ During the course of the interview, Harry requested that Grindr be referred to as “the program” in order to remain discrete about his use of Grindr. When he says, “then I move on to the program,” he is referring to Grindr.

Grindr was also popular among interviewees because it allowed them to gain information about potential partners (sexual or otherwise) upfront, as opposed to meeting them in bars or physical locations where there was uncertainty about one's relationship status, sexual interest, or personalities. For these interview participants, Grindr (like traditional dating websites) gave users information they felt they needed to determine if other users were "worth their time" to interact with.

During the course of the interview, Raymond began recalling when he first started using dating websites to meet other gay men. For him, having information on potential partners before speaking with them made it easier to begin a conversation. This increased his confidence in a potential relationship (romantic or otherwise), since he already knew that they shared certain interests. This perception contrasted with a belief that, at a bar or social setting in person, he would be disadvantaged due to a lack of knowledge on a potential partner's relationship status, purpose for being at the bar, etc.

For the Yahoo Personal, Match.com, I was an early adopter of those things. As soon as they came out I was interested. I don't like late at night, I don't like going to clubs, I don't like going to bars, I hate loud music, I hate dancing. It was a much better way to meet people. Plus, it's easier to break the ice. If someone's got their profile you can just say "hi." If you go to approach someone in person, you don't know if they want to be bothered by you, or maybe they're just with their friends—who knows! At least with a profile, you have the information that, if this person is single or not single, is looking or not looking. You have all of that information upfront, which you'd never guess in a real social situation (Raymond, 51, Interview).

Raymond's preference for having information about someone before contacting them is also echoed through comments made by other interviewees. Chad and others reported feeling that men are often at bars with friends, which makes it challenging for them to approach them and

attempt to engage in conversation. Not only are their intentions uncertain in terms of whether or not they are looking to talk with new people outside their group of friends, but again, their relationship status is uncertain, their sexual tastes are unclear, and so forth. The additional information provided by profiles through traditional websites and Grindr help interviewees in determining who would be worthy investments of their time.

It goes back to going out to the bars and taking the time to try and meet somebody who's in a group, if you're interested or, you know, trying to find out a little bit about them before you even find out, you know, are they available, are they partnered, or, what is their situation? Whereas, because of the online thing, a lot of that information is already provided. Am I looking for someone who's partnered? Am I looking for someone who is negative or positive? Does that matter? Am I looking for somebody who, you know, barebacks or doesn't bareback... On a lot of those sites you can find all that out, before you even talk to the person. So it's like, okay, is this person a good match?... [Grindr] gives you a little more information about the person. Before you waste time or start trying to figure out who this person is" (Chad, 42, interview).

For Chad and Raymond, the information they get through online profiles (either traditional websites or Grindr) helps them to decide which users seem more closely suited to their needs and desires. Chad provides additional insight into how interviewees browse through Grindr profiles when he discusses how he approaches Grindr:

The way I approach it is, you know, if I see somebody's picture who's, you know, like, I think they've got an interesting picture, you know, I like their...what little they have on their profile, you know, cuz they don't give you a lot of information. But, you know, if there is some interest there, I'll send them a "hello" or a "hot pic" or, you know, I'll start a conversation. And if they respond, great! If they don't, no harm, no foul, you know. I don't take it personally if people don't respond to things because I know, you know, there's certain things I look for in people, there's certain things, you know, I am not interested in. So, if someone doesn't respond to me I assume either

they're not interested or, you know, I didn't meet one of their criteria, and you move on" (Chad, 42, interview).

In Chad's approach to Grindr, there is a sense that not much is expected from other users. Thus, not much is expected from him, either. If someone's picture does not appeal to Chad right away or if someone's brief profile does not immediately spark his interest, he simply moves on to another profile; if they have written him, he will not reply. Chad's description of how he uses Grindr mirrors many other interview participants and shows how the availability of profile information provides an opportunity for efficiency when using Grindr.

Shawn, a 26 year old living in Capitol Hill, reiterates the value of efficiency in information, but he also says that Grindr and other online mediums tend to raise his expectations for the experience he desires, in this case sex:

When you're looking for something, it is not about the person. So, I am looking for sex, therefore I can go on Grindr and I am going to find it. It's not going to be about that man that I am going to end up in bed with tonight. It's going to be about me having an expectation that someone, somewhere in Seattle, is going to meet my expectation. I feel like that's what happens with these technology tools to meet people, it's like your expectation, you're looking for something. It's not about the person (Shawn, 26, interview).

Shawn further elaborates that the more information he has about a specific user, the greater his expectations. For example, he refers to traditional websites such as okcupid.com where users provide a great deal of information, including their personal interests, what they are looking for in a relationship, and multiple photos. Due to the volume of information, Shawn feels confident in contacting users based on the information provided in the profile (like Raymond). Yet he also has a more defined imagine or expectation of what the other user is like in person. In other words, if they

have many things in common, including relationship goals, then Shawn expects that something meaningful will come out of the interaction. All too often, however, these expectations are not met, and he is left feeling disappointed.

With Grindr, however, users are only able to provide a limited amount of information, and it is consequently easier to have lower expectations. The lack of information on Grindr profiles thus makes it easier to start conversations by easing fears of rejection. Shawn reported that Grindr was his preferred method of meeting other men over more traditional websites. While this may not be the case with all interviewees, those quoted here, as well as others, certainly share the sentiment that having less information about other men makes them, in some ways, easier to approach. There is less disappointment in being turned down by a photo of someone you hardly know than by a profile of someone who you imagined could be your next boyfriend.

Interviewees expressed a sense of efficiency when using Grindr in multiple ways. First, interviewees use Grindr during periods of down time or “in-between” moments, times often characterized by waiting for a companion or the hours before one arrives at a destination. Rather than “do nothing,” participants would open their Grindr in order to check messages and see who might be around as they browsed through the various profiles. Use of Grindr for these participants was often out of a desire to be efficient with their time. Multiple authors have commented on the use of mobile phones during these in-between moments, particularly while commuting (see Caronia 2005, Sheller and Urry 2007, Bull 2007, Ito *et al* 2008, and Hampton *et al* 2009). Secondly, the information that interviewees were able to gain through Grindr about other users proved to be an efficient use of their time in two ways. In

one sense, participants used the limited information on user profiles to determine if an individual would be worth their time to engage in conversation. On the other hand, the limited information also encouraged participants to have lower expectations and thus be more willing to approach those they might not approach in other situations. The limited information provided in the profiles of Grindr users was sufficient for interviewees to choose who might be worthy of engaging in conversation, but it was not enough information to allow them to develop certain expectations of the outcome of their contacts. For those interviewed, Grindr is an efficient way to spend their down time, contact potentialities, and manage expectations.

Negotiation

When interviewees were asked what made Grindr different from other online dating or social networking websites, there was universal agreement that its location-based system was the premier draw. For some, the ability to see where other users were in relation to themselves was a major benefit. For example, when they desired sex, they could find it more readily available and with a nearby partner. This might not necessarily be the case if they had utilized a traditional website. Yet, the vast majority of participants reported signing into Grindr not knowing exactly what they are looking for. As demonstrated earlier, most participants do not have a clear goal or objective when they use Grindr, but rather use it to “kill time” and see what they might find. Often the spaces in which these moments of boredom or down time occur are while they are at home, at work, in transit, or at coffee shops around the region.

The location in which users accessed Grindr had a significant bearing on their experience and use of the application. The places mentioned so far have been everyday locations in which participants would open Grindr in

order to check their messages, look up their favourites and see who might be around the spaces they are at throughout the day. Participants' use of Grindr regularly constitutes a negotiation of space in which they sign in to the application not necessarily looking for a specific type of experience or relationship, but rather looking to see other Grindr users who reside nearby or are close to where they are located at that specific time. This negotiation of space occurs on a daily basis in everyday locations, although some exceptional locations were pointed out by participants in which the location based aspect of the application was of a particular interest. Namely, these locations are gay bars and clubs on Capitol Hill, and alternative neighbourhoods and cities that did not constitute part of their everyday spaces. While Grindr was used by participants to explore their everyday surroundings during more frequent, casual uses of the application, participants were particularly interested in using the application while straying from common routines. This interest is fuelled in part because the application only shows users the one hundred individuals nearest to their location, thereby restricting the variety of users to a select geographical area. However, when Grindr is used outside of everyday spaces, a hundred new potentialities emerge for participants to browse and interact with.

The majority of interviewees reported frequenting almost exclusively gay bars and clubs on Capitol Hill. While for some participants, going out to gay bars and clubs on Capitol Hill was more significant than for others, no one reported going out to these venues on a daily basis. Some went out on Capitol Hill as much as three or four times a week, whereas others might only go once or twice a month. Those who went out more often to Capitol Hill usually lived in the neighbourhood, and those who did not typically lived outside Seattle. For those who lived outside Seattle, the distance was the

main factor in their decision not to frequent gay bars and clubs on Capitol Hill. This did not preclude them from going out to gay venues, as they reported patronizing gay bars and clubs closer to home, such as in Tacoma or Everett. Although participants went out to gay venues regularly, they were still exceptional places compared to their everyday locations.

Chad is 26, lives on Capitol Hill, and is currently not going out to neighbourhood gay bars and clubs as often as he did in the past. He says that he went out more often with friends when he was actively seeking hookups and men for sex. Lately, however, he is less interested in looking for hookups and therefore he goes out to gay bars and clubs less frequently:

And I find that even when I do go out to the bars, I tend to spend some of my time on my phone seeing, okay, checking Grindr, who's in the area. Again, to sort of see, is there anybody who shares interest, you know, if I am interested, and I send them a message. Do they respond? Are they in the bar so we can start a conversation? Or, is there somebody nearby who isn't at the bar who would be interested in hooking up if that's what I am looking for (Chad, 42, interview).

Like Chad, A.K.A also signs into Grindr while he is at gay bars and clubs on Capitol Hill. He is 23 and lives with his boyfriend south of downtown Seattle. Often he finds it difficult to engage with others while at the bar or club because, usually, they are with friends, or at least appear to be with other people they may know. Grindr provides an opportunity for A.K.A to find others in the bar or general area who may also be in a similar situation, and who may want to meet right away for a drink and conversation. The application also entertains A.K.A while he is at gay bars and clubs, since he is curious about its location accuracy to other users. In this situation, gay bars and clubs present a unique situation in which A.K.A is more likely to be in the same room as another Grindr user when they are both online at the same time.

Sometimes, yeah, but a lot of times say I am at a gay bar and I log on to it, it's mostly for the novelty value to see how accurate this is. To see if, you know, it says this guy is 430 feet away, he's standing right in front of me—it's a bit ish, it's a little bit off. Or, sometimes it's—I have been in a club before and have for whatever reason not been able to strike up a conversation with somebody face to face, and I have found someone who is in the same club on Grindr, who is having the same problem, and, you know, invite him over, tell him where I am at. Or, we go meet up in the club or whatever (A.K.A, 23, interview).

A.K.A and Chad both describe using Grindr similarly while at gay bars and clubs on Capitol Hill, informing us that they both use it to see who might be in the bar or in the immediate area and might be interested in meeting at that particular time. While most participants used Grindr at gay bars and clubs similarly to A.K.A and Chad, some participants found Grindr to be beneficial in other ways while at gay bars and clubs. For example, Raymond, a 51 year old, unemployed, single gay man living near Capitol Hill, had been chatting with a Grindr user recently and, one night while at a gay bar in Capitol Hill, started a conversation with one of the patrons. As they talked and Grindr was brought up, they both realized that they had in fact talked with each other on the application.

There was a guy who was flirting with me and talking regularly on Grindr, and I thought he was attractive and I would have even hooked up with him. He already had a lover so he's not dating material, but he's still very attractive and he wanted to hook up. Then I was in the Cuff one weekend and I started talking to this guy, and I didn't realize it was him. I'd seen the photos so many times, but seeing him in real life—I didn't make the connection. We were talking and I said, "Oh, you have an iPhone. Do you ever use Grindr? Do you ever go on there?" and he said, "Yeah," and he showed me his profile, I said, "Oh," and I showed him mine, and then neither one of us recognized each other. Then we went home with each other that night. We hooked up that night. (Raymond, 51, interview).

While Raymond's experience may be slightly unique in that he met a Grindr user whom he had previously chatted with and yet failed to recall this

virtual meeting when in person, his story is representative of a small group of participants who reported seeing familiar faces from Grindr while at gay bars and clubs. In this example, Raymond may not have been on Grindr while he was at the bar, but because of previous interactions on Grindr, his experience at the bar was altered.

In describing his experience of using Grindr at gay bars and clubs, Harry says, “I don’t think I’ve ever been to a bar that I hadn’t signed into it in the last several years” (Harry, 29, interview). He goes on to say,

I think it’s sort of a catalyst, because I have been at bars and I’ve seen people online and I start the conversation online, and then we actually will meet minutes later. In that sense, I guess, I meet people off of there sometimes often. But it’s because they are standing 50 feet from me and then I am like, “Where are they at?” you know, looking for them through the crowd at the bar (Harry, 29, interview).

In this quote from Harry, the term “catalyst” is used to describe his experience in using Grindr while at gay bars and clubs. Even though he is at the same bar as other Grindr users, the application made it easier to approach them. As discussed previously, many interviewees commented that the Grindr platform made it easy to approach and contact men that they may not otherwise in person. Participants essentially feel that there is less at stake—they have less to lose—if they contact someone through Grindr, rather than on other online mediums or in person. In these examples where Grindr helps participants negotiate the space of gay bars and clubs, the platform of the application gives them the opportunity to interact with other users who are at the same bar. Instead of making a clear public commitment to speak with one particular person at the bar, participants save face by contacting other bar patrons through Grindr, rendering rejection acceptable and allowing initial conversations to quickly develop into a physical meeting.

Using Grindr as a catalyst, particularly at gay bars and clubs, is not only strongly indicated by interviewees, but for at least one individual was the main reason he started using the smart phone application. Shawn first learned about Grindr while he was at a gay bar on Capitol Hill with a group of friends. Eventually, one companion informed him he was leaving to meet someone he had connected with using Grindr. When asked what had initially made him interested in downloading Grindr after first hearing about it, he replied, “That you could find people, like, if you were at the bar. You could find people close and it would be really easy or quick to meet someone” (Shawn, 26, interview).

Beyond gay bars and clubs, participants reported using Grindr when they traveled to less frequented neighbourhoods or cities in order to negotiate these specific locales. Since Grindr users are only able to see the one hundred users nearest to their current location, participants pointed out a specific desire to use Grindr while in different neighbourhoods or cities that they may not visit on a daily basis. For example, Shawn reported that he preferred to not sign into Grindr from home because he would always see the same guys, making the application less appealing. However, when he opens Grindr while he is in different Seattle neighbourhoods or while traveling to other cities, such as San Francisco or Washington, D.C., he gets to see different Grindr users.

Chad further elaborates this point when he says,

Occasionally, if I am going out and there’s not much going on at the bar, or there’s nobody I see around who I am that interested in, I’ll go online and see what’s going on in the area, in the neighbourhood, in the place that I am in. Again, part of that is to see new people that are in a different area. Because, when I sign on in Tacoma, it tends to be a lot of the same people, over and over again, who are in the neighbourhood. Whereas if I am up on Capitol Hill and I sign on, it’s

like, oh, here are new people with new pictures, new profiles, new potentials (Chad, 42, interview).

Another example of using Grindr in areas not often visited by participants comes from A.K.A, who used to travel 30 miles east of Seattle to North Bend, Washington, in order to work weekends doing odd jobs for a friend. While he was outside his familiar surroundings of downtown Seattle and Capitol Hill, he would sign into Grindr to see other users nearby.

And so I would use Grindr to find other guys in this rural part of town, this part of Washington, and I actually did very well out there, much to my surprise. I never thought there would be that many of gay guys, you know, out in the sticks (A.K.A, 23, interview).

In this brief quote from A.K.A, we can see that use of Grindr in different geographical settings apart from the everyday can expose users to a variety of other Grindr users, while also impacting their understanding of the new places they are visiting. Before using Grindr in the more rural setting of North Bend, A.K.A had certain assumptions about the area and who lived there. After he turned on Grindr and could visualize and eventually meet other Grindr users in the area, however, his perception of the rural community was altered.

A common theme among these stories from a variety of participants is that place matters when they sign on to Grindr. What sets this application apart from other dating or online social experiences is that it shows users the approximate distance of other users from their current location. The novelty or excitement of the application is lost, however, if users remain in a few select places such as where they live, where they work or go to school, or their daily travel routes. What makes Grindr particularly interesting for these participants is their own mobility and using the application in places that are not part of their everyday routine. Once they leave their home, work, or daily travel routes, they are open to new and different profiles and potentialities.

No longer do they see the same pictures they saw the week before, but rather a plethora of fresh faces and new possibilities.

The significance of place is highlighted in the negotiation of exceptional spaces visited by participants. When interviewees are using Grindr as part of their everyday routines, they are not as focused on who might be around these locations, since they frequent them often enough to know the usual profiles. Rather, they might be more focused on checking their messages, seeing where their favourites might be and if they are online, and to see who might be new in the area. There is certainly an element of negotiation of space, but it is rendered inconsequential the fact that these are the spaces that participants frequent, and therefore the users they have access to change relatively infrequently. Once participants moved to more exceptional spaces, such as gay bars and clubs (particularly on Capitol Hill) and new neighbourhoods and cities, the location-based feature of Grindr intensified in importance. The new profiles and possibilities accessible to participants have the potential to enhance their experience of a new environment. When interviewees use Grindr in these exceptional spaces, they are not simply looking to check their messages or see who might be new. Rather, they are more actively looking to see the different profiles and engage with other nearby users in-person. For example, when participants reported using Grindr while at gay bars and clubs, they reported using Grindr in order to see who else might be around and with whom they could strike up a conversation. Rather than starting a conversation in person, most participants found it easier to start a conversation through Grindr and then meet in person if mutual interest developed. As one participant noted, Grindr in this case acts like a catalyst and helps to negotiate exceptional spaces not usually visited by interviewees. When participants sign into Grindr

in familiar areas, the application reminds them of their location each time they see the same profiles as they have seen before. When they travel to different places, however, they are aware that there will be different Grindr users accessible to them. They will thus sign into the application knowing they might be able to alter their experience of the places they are visiting.

Conclusion

This chapter reviews and analyzes responses from participants who were interviewed on their uses of Grindr during the course of my fieldwork. I asked the following specific questions: How do men use Grindr? What types of interactions are they having on Grindr? And, do these men also go to local gay bars and clubs? The themes of convenience, efficiency, and negotiation of space provide a great deal of insight into these original questions by suggesting that Grindr users engage with the application differently according to the spaces in which they use it. When participants used Grindr in their everyday spaces, such as home, work, while in transit, and so forth, the application was used alongside other means to keep them busy or entertained. In the more exceptional spaces of gay bars and clubs, or in unfamiliar neighbourhoods or cities, participants more actively engaged with the application to inform their experience and understanding of less familiar surroundings.

The themes of convenience and efficiency show us that participants use the application passively in their daily lives. A significant reason why Grindr was convenient for interviewees was because of the medium in which it was delivered. Since their smart phone was small, portable, and discrete, users could be doing other things, including using Grindr. In this case, use of Grindr is more a result of it being on their phones, as opposed to users being allured by the program itself. More often than not, when users are using

Grindr, they are also using similar dating applications and/or visiting traditional dating websites through their phone. With Grindr conveniently accessible to users through their phone, participants highlighted how they use Grindr to be more efficient with their time, whether keeping busy in between appointments or avoiding wasting time talking with someone they are not interested in. Efficiency in using Grindr represents a more active use of the application in the sense that users are not just using the application because it is convenient, but rather because it helps them manage how they use their time. In this sense, Grindr can be seen more as a tool that helps them to be direct and be efficient with their time, although its use is fairly inconsequential. Participants use the application when they have down time, and when they do actively use it, it is with the knowledge that they are either going to find what they are looking for in a person or not. The passive use of Grindr as demonstrated through the themes of convenience and efficiency takes place in more everyday spaces familiar to participants. When participants are outside their familiar surroundings, their use of Grindr becomes more active and engaging.

Outside of the spaces of their usual daily routines, interview participants discussed using Grindr more actively to engage with the area around them. Since the application only displays a limited number of users who are in the general vicinity, users are more interested in using the application in places they may not normally visit. In this case, participants said that they used Grindr often when they were at gay bars or clubs and in new neighbourhoods or cities. In these more exceptional spaces, Grindr was not only more interesting to users because they were permitted to view other users they may not normally see, but it was also a way for participants to more actively engage with their surroundings and alter their experience of

exceptional spaces. Participants often discussed using Grindr to locate other users while they were at gay bars and clubs in hopes of meeting right away for a conversation, a drink, or sex. Some participants also referred to using Grindr while in different cities in effort to see a fresh supply of profiles and to get to know others around them in a place they infrequently visit. In these exceptional spaces, Grindr users more actively engage with the application's location-based feature, showing other users and their general distance from the participant. In unique spaces, this particular feature not only becomes more appealing; it's a way for participants to engage with their surroundings and perhaps influence their experience of place.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Introduction

For a very long time, the fundamental social institution for gay men was the gay bar. It was often secluded—a refuge, a safe zone, and a clearinghouse for sexual pickups. Most bars still perform some of those functions. But the Internet dealt them a body-blow. If you are merely looking for sex or a date, the Web is now the first stop for most gay men (Sullivan 2005).

The preceding quote from social commentator Andrew Sullivan establishes a key assumption that other social commentators, fellow geographers, and academics have made recently: gay bars and neighbourhoods are in decline because of the Internet. Although there is ample evidence to the contrary from other disciplines (Gudelunas 2005, Murphy *et al* 2004, Sanders 2008), a rigorous geographical approach would help to enhance our understanding of the intersection of online spaces and physical places. At a time when online spaces are increasingly becoming more mobile and accessible to a wide range of socioeconomic classes, there are growing questions about how these technologies are being used and the behaviour of users themselves. Instead of having to remain stationary in front of a computer to access the online “world,” these spaces are now being accessed via mobile devices from a range of locations. The physical mobility of users is actually used by these technologies they are accessing, creating an interplay between online space and the physical environment. Simply put, the experience of the online space found through mobile applications like Grindr are heavily influenced by the physical location of the user, and vice versa.

The purpose of this study is to call attention to the need for a geographical understanding of how online spaces are interrelated with physical places. Several immediate questions arise over those using the

prominent gay, mobile, social application called Grindr. How are gay men using these services? What types of interactions are they having? Do these men also go to local gay bars and clubs? After administering an online survey and conducting fourteen semi-structured interviews of Seattle area Grindr users, a key finding in this study is that the use of the mobile phone application does have an impact on the ways in which gay men utilize gay-identified physical spaces. Movement was critical to making the application interesting to users, as was being located in places where there would be a concentration of other users who could increase the possibilities of meeting new users (e.g., men in notably gay neighbourhoods). These findings regarding the use of online spaces, however, undermine the argument made by Ruting (2008) and others who say that gay spaces are in decline due to the rise of online opportunities for men to meet other men. For my survey respondents, their use of virtual spaces depends on the physical places in which users are accessing them. With gay bars and neighbourhoods undergoing significant changes, it is critical for geographers and other social scientists to engage in a rigorous debate as to the causes and consequences of these changes. This study hopefully adds to the ongoing debate and contributes greater attention to the intersection of online spaces and physical places.

“This is a Gay Bar”

Recently, geographers have observed that gay neighbourhoods and events are “de-gayng” as they become tools for city economic development as opposed to spaces for sexual minorities (Bell & Bennie 2000, Rushbrook 2001, Markwell 2001, Bell & Bennie 2004, Bennie 2004, Bennie & Skeggs 2004, Johnston 2005, Matejskova 2007, Ruting 2008). These changes to the cultural landscape of urban queer spaces have forced those in geography and

other disciplines to explore how sexual minorities, who once dominated these spaces, have adapted to the changing landscape. Some have suggested that the queer community has migrated to the Internet and use online spaces to meet others and build a social community that avoids use of local gay neighbourhoods (Campbell 2004, Sullivan 2005, Fraser 2007, Ruting 2008, Johnston & Longhurst 2010, Usher & Morrison 2010). Yet, other researchers have found that gay men who use the Internet in search of other men use it in order to strengthen local social networks and knowledge of local gay spaces and neighbourhoods (Murphy *et al* 2004, Gudelunas 2005, Sanders 2008).

In many respects, the literature on gay men's use of the Internet constructs a binary framework wherein, on one hand, Internet use takes gay men away from the local gay neighbourhood, and, on the other, Internet use connects gay men to their local gay-identified neighbourhood. Sanders (2008) complicates this narrative by suggesting that gay men use the Internet in a variety of ways to connect with other men. As geographers continue to explore the "de-gayng" of gay neighbourhoods and suggest that the Internet is contributing to this process, this study calls for a fuller examination of how gay men use the Internet and online spaces. Furthermore, as online spaces become more dynamic, accessible, and mainstreamed through smart phone technology and applications such as Grindr, the intersection between online and physical spaces become even more consequential. In a time when men can access hand held devices anywhere, anytime, and interact with other men near to their geographical location, this study raises questions about the "de-gayng" neighbourhood and how the queer community is adapting.

Seattle, Washington, USA and Its Changing Queer Geographies

In responding to Gavin Brown's call for a queering of more "ordinary" cities, Seattle, Washington, USA, serves as the backdrop to this study. In the

context of the literature on globalization, global cities, and queer geography, Seattle is decidedly ordinary, as it is rarely made part of the discourse (save for some particular examples such as Atkins 2003, Brown and Morrill 2011, Lyons 2004). At the same time, the city's "gaybourhood," Capitol Hill, is undergoing significant changes similar to those identified in other cities such as Sydney (Ruting 2008), Atlanta (Doan 2011), and Manchester, UK (Binnie & Skeggs 2004).

Capitol Hill is changing. Brown *et al* (2011) paint the picture vividly when they focus on signs that read, "ATTN: THIS IS A GAY BAR. A VERY GAY BAR. IF YOU AREN'T A QUEER OR AN ADMIRER, DON'T ENTER" (Underlines in original text, Brown *et al* 2011). Signs like this are visible indications of a changing neighbourhood, along with the growth in development, and the challenges this has presented to the neighbourhood in preserving a very distinct LGBT identity. These changes did not develop out of nowhere, and are in fact part of a greater effort from local city boosters to market the city to not only tourists, but to young professionals looking for rainbow-coloured urbanity (see Florida 2002).

As cities market themselves and their gay communities in an effort to attract young professionals and mobile capital, their efforts are showing signs of success. In Seattle, controversy arose in June 2006 when organizers of the annual Gay Pride Parade and Fair decided to move the festivities from Capitol Hill, seen as the city's gay neighbourhood, to the Central Business District (CBD) and the Seattle Center (Turnbull 2006, Atkins 2003). In arguing for the move, Seattle Out and Proud, the official organizers, cited the need to accommodate the growing number of visitors, as the traditional route along Broadway had become too constrained. Furthermore, it was argued that the fair site, Volunteer Park (located on Capitol Hill and closely

associated with the gay community), was too small and lacked sufficient parking (Turnbull 2006). The move struck a chord with business owners on Capitol Hill, however, because the weekend-long event provided a significant revenue source to an already stressed market (Turnbull 2006, Turnbull 2007).

The move of the city's Pride celebrations highlight growing concerns among business owners and residents about neighbourhood development and increasing gentrification. At issue is the growing demand for housing and retail space in the neighbourhood and a flagging supply. Between 1997 and 2006, rent prices for a one-bedroom apartment have increased by over 50%. In 2006, more antiquated retail space rent averaged \$15 to \$20 per square foot, and for newer spaces the rent averaged about \$25 to \$40, the difference being 40% to 50%. The result has been a reduction of gay bars and an increase in retail shops like Kinko's, tanning salons, and Walgreens (Barnett 2006, Brown *et al* 2011). With increasing apartment rates and higher rents for new retail space developers have seen the opportunity to capitalise on demand, which has resulted in razing existing retail space in order to build additional housing and newer retail space in their place (Barnett 2006).

Geographers go online!

Many geographers and social commentators have suggested that the queer community has gone online and is abandoning the physical environs that have sheltered the community for decades. However, these claims ignore other studies that suggest the story is much more complicated. Geographers who have explored the "de-gaying" phenomenon of gay neighbourhoods have also commented on the role that the Internet has played in this process. Binnie (2004) for instance has suggested that queers are finding a sense of community online and this perhaps means that gay bars are less needed for men to meet one another. In discussing economic gentrification in Sydney,

Ruting (2008) argues, among the many factors contributing to the “de-gaying” of the Darlinghurst neighbourhood (Sydney’s gaybourhood), is the use of the Internet by gay men, which results in less need for the gay physical spaces that the neighbourhood once offered. The geographical literature discussing gay men’s use of the Internet suggest that use of online spaces comes at the expense of gay physical spaces. Literatures from sociology and communication studies, which have examined gay men’s use of the Internet in much greater detail, support these claims (Campbell 2004, Fraser 2007, Usher & Morrison 2010, Wakeford 2000, Gross 2003).

While some authors believe that the Internet is being used by the gay community to by-pass gentrifying gaybourhoods in order to build a sense of community and belonging, other authors argue that gay men use the Internet to build knowledge of gay physical spaces and use these spaces in conjunction with the Internet to meet friends, romantic interests, etc. Through a reading of Sanders (2008), Murphy *et al.* (2004), and Gudlundas (2005), it is evident that these authors view Internet use among gay men as a means of connecting online users with local users and local gay spaces and neighbourhoods. These readings counter the positions of Campbell (2004), Fraser (2007), and Usher and Morrison (2010), who argue that gay men’s use of the Internet has resulted in their changing use of gay neighbourhoods. Sanders (2008) helps to complicate the literature, however, by demonstrating that users of these online spaces express various motivations and interest. While some of the men who Sanders (2008) interviewed used gay chat websites because it was easier than going to gay-identified spaces, this was not a universal finding in the interviews. Furthermore, the work of Sanders (2008) confirms Murphy *et al’s* (2004) finding that gay men who use the internet continue to use gay bars to connect with the gay community. Taken

together, the literature here questions those who argue that gay men are using the internet to meet other gay men while leaving gay bars and neighbourhoods behind. The Internet has certainly provided new ways for gay men to meet one another, though it appears that gay men continue to use gay bars and neighbourhoods despite the ‘de-gaying’ gentrification that has been observed by geographers.

The apparent contradiction that these two bodies of literature expose brings us to the aims and research questions of this project. Through online surveys and semi-structured interviews, the research questions identified in the literature review and earlier in this chapter were explored among Seattle area Grindr users. The results of these efforts show that for these users, online spaces are more complementary, rather than an alternative, to the physical spaces participants access and use.

Findings

In this spirit, I conducted field work during the summer months of 2011 investigating how Seattle area Grindr users use the online application and if/how local gay bars and clubs played a role in their everyday lives. More generally, I was interested in how Grindr was a part of their everyday lives. Through surveys and semi-structured interviews, participants shared that they integrate Grindr into their everyday lives because it is convenient, efficient, and it allows them to negotiate gay spaces and the places that surround them.

Writer June Thomas gives us a brief and simple description of what Grindr is:

I first heard about Grindr from Irish writer Colm Toibin. At a fancy-pants New York panel on “Authors in the Age of the Internet” sponsored by the London Review of Books last April, then-55-year-old Toibin told a charming, shaggy-dog story about his adventures in

gay social media. He described how he'd fantasized about a piece of technology that would marry a gay-dating service with GPS to create a device that would tell you "there's a guy if you turn left." Then he discovered that such a thing exists; it's called Grindr. Grindr is a location-based phone app that displays a grid of photographs of other members in your immediate vicinity, arranged by distance. If you like the look of someone's picture and blurb, you can chat and arrange to get together. I love the directness of the sample chat on the company website: "Hey bud I like your profile." "Thanks man. You too. Where u at?" [Sends map] "Let's meet. Here's a photo." Who said the art of seduction is dead? (Thomas 2011).

Grindr is an application that, as of January 2012, reports to have over 3.5 million users in over 192 countries. The United States, by far, has the largest number of users (nearly 1.5 million) and Seattle is ranked as the 10th most populist city worldwide on Grindr with 60,000 users. Like Thomas's account, these users have a profile on Grindr, and, when they open the application, a grid of other local users (featuring a thumbnail of their picture), is displayed. If users like the profile of another user, they are then able to send a message to them and start a conversation.

Survey

The online survey provided us with a general overview of participants' demographics and gave us a general sense as to how participants used Grindr and local gay-identified spaces. Survey results indicated that participants are "out," younger, gay men who identify with the broader Seattle area gay community, and who use Grindr as a multi-functional application while going about their daily lives. These responses support the themes identified through the semi-structured interviews, which will be explored in the following section.

The survey yielded a validity rate of 95% (62 out of 65 responses were eligible) and indicated that respondents were generally younger gay-

identified men who come from varying socio-economic backgrounds, but generally live within Seattle proper. A strong majority of participants reported being in their thirties or younger. When respondents were asked to identify their sex and sexual orientation, 88.7% reported identifying as a male and 83.6% identified themselves as gay. A wide spread of socio-economic backgrounds were represented, with 24.2% earning over \$100,000 per year, 37.1% earning \$45,000 per year or less, and 14.5% reporting to be students. Finally, respondents represent a variety of locations in the study region, from urban to suburban; the majority (71%), however, reported living in Seattle proper.

A key finding from the survey is that respondents reported using Grindr in multiple ways while continuing to identify and engage with local gay-identified spaces. Through a series of questions, participants indicated that their use of Grindr was not exclusive to particular times or places, but generally when they were bored. When respondents were asked to indicate what types of experiences they were looking for when on Grindr, and what types of experiences they actually had while using the application, most indicated that their desired experiences mirrored actual events, generally being inconsequential chatting with other users. The majority of respondents have also met other users in person (75.8%), but this seems to be more the exception than the norm for most interactions, especially when considering how often respondents reported using Grindr compared to the frequency with which they reported meeting other men in person (41.9% indicated meeting two to five men face-to-face in the previous six months and about 60% report using the application on a weekly basis). Grindr was not only a way for participants to pass the time, but to also meet other men for sex, relationships, and cultivating friendships. In addition to using Grindr for

multiple purposes, survey respondents also reported identifying and engaging with local gay-identified spaces. The vast majority of respondents reported that Capitol Hill was *the* Seattle gay neighbourhood, and that when they went out to gay bars and clubs, it was often in Capitol Hill.

Results from this survey indicate that Seattle area users of Grindr are generally “out” gay men who identify with the broader Seattle area gay community and use Grindr as a multi-functional application while going about their daily lives. The survey here seems to suggest that men who do use Grindr continue to go to gay bars and clubs and overall seek out gay spaces. For these Seattle area Grindr users, the Capitol Hill neighbourhood is seen as a unique space in the city for the gay community. No matter where these men may live in the Puget Sound region, they continue to spend at least some of their free time in this locale. Specifically, when we refer back to the research questions, the survey indicates that Grindr users use the application while they are bored, that generally they are chatting with other users and occasionally meeting in person, and that they continue to identify and engage with local gay-identified spaces like gay bars and clubs. Rather than “replacing the traditional gay bar,” these Grindr users suggest that, for them, Grindr is a way to pass the time and maybe, occasionally, find someone interesting, while also continuing to seek other ways to meet gay men through friends, other online spaces, or even gay bars and clubs. The survey results support the themes of convenience, efficiency, and negotiation, which are further articulated through the analysis of the semi-structured interviews.

Interviews

The themes of convenience, efficiency, and negotiation of space provide a great deal of insight into the original research questions, and fill in the gaps of the survey results by suggesting that Grindr users engage with the

application differently according to the spaces in which they use it. When participants used Grindr in their everyday spaces, such as home, work, while in transit, and so forth, the application was used alongside other means to keep them busy or entertained. In the more exceptional spaces of gay bars and clubs, however, participants more actively engaged with the application to inform their experience and understanding of less familiar surroundings. Convenience and efficiency show us that participants use the application passively in their daily lives. A significant reason why Grindr was convenient for interviewees was because of the medium in which it was delivered. Since their smart phone was small, portable, and discrete, users could be doing other things, including using Grindr. This theme is nicely exemplified by Chad who uses Grindr often while doing other things such as watching TV primarily because his mobile phone is easily accessible during this relatively passive activity. In this case, use of Grindr is more a result of it being on their phones, as opposed to users being allured by the program itself. More often than not, when users are using Grindr, they are also using similar dating applications and/or visiting traditional dating websites through their phone. Survey results also support this position, with 64% of respondents reporting that they use multiple smart phone applications to chat with other men.

With Grindr conveniently accessible to users through their phone, participants highlighted how they use Grindr to be more efficient with their time, whether keeping busy in between appointments or avoiding wasting time talking with someone they are not interested in. Harry, a 29 year old interviewee from Tacoma, says he uses Grindr to multitask, often while taking public transit. Results from the survey also support this theme, as over 85% of respondents reported using Grindr in multiple locations such as cafes, while in transit, at home, or while at gay bars/clubs. Efficiency in using

Grindr represents a more active use of the application in the sense that users are not just using the application because it is convenient, but also because it helps them manage how they use their time. In this sense, Grindr can be seen more as a tool that helps people to be direct and efficient with time, though its use is fairly inconsequential. Participants use the application when they have down time, and when they do actively use it, it is with the knowledge that they are either going to find what they are looking for in a person or not. The passive use of Grindr as demonstrated through the themes of convenience and efficiency take place in more everyday spaces familiar to participants. When participants are outside their familiar surroundings, their use of Grindr becomes more active and engaging.

Outside of the spaces of their usual daily routines, interview participants discussed using Grindr more actively to engage with the area around them. Since the application only displays a limited number of users who are in the general vicinity, users are more interested in using the application in places they may not normally visit. In this case, participants said that they used Grindr often when they were at gay bars or clubs and in new neighbourhoods or cities. For example, interviewee A.K.A reports that he often signs into Grindr when he is at gay bars and clubs. Survey results also support this theme, with 51.6% of respondents reporting using Grindr while at gay bars/clubs and 58.1% reporting using it in other cities. Although we cannot determine if other locations reported by respondents are outside commonly frequented neighbourhoods, the plethora of locations reported support the position that the application is heavily used from a variety of locations, and that it is desirable to use the application in multiple places. In these more exceptional spaces, Grindr was not only more interesting to users because they were permitted to view other users they may not normally see,

but also because it was a way for participants to more actively engage with their surroundings and hopefully alter their experience of the exceptional spaces. Participants often discussed using Grindr to locate other users while they were at gay bars and clubs in hopes of meeting right away for a conversation, a drink, or sex. Some participants also referred to using Grindr while in different cities in effort to see a fresh supply of profiles, in addition to getting to know others around them in a place they infrequently visit. In these exceptional spaces, Grindr users more actively engage with the application's location based feature, showing other users and their general distance from the participant. In unique spaces, this particular feature not only becomes more appealing, but it is a way for participants to engage with their surroundings and perhaps influence their experience of a place.

The work of Adriana de Souza e Silva and Sharif Mowlabocus helps us to articulate the significance of the online survey and semi-structured interview results. De Souza e Silva developed the concept of “hybrid spaces” and defined it as:

[...]mobile spaces, created by the constant movement of users who carry portable devices continuously connected to the Internet and to other users. The possibility of an ‘always-on’ connection when one moves through a city transforms our experience of space by unfolding remote contexts inside the present context (2006).

Mowlabocus explores the concept of hybrid spaces through an analysis of user experience of location-based technologies as presented through Bluetooth dating and Grindr (2010). The author argues that the hybrid space created by these technologies rearticulated “pre-existing relationships between space, subject and technology” (2010). Furthermore the author says that:

Such networking tools rely not only on the physical spaces through which users move, but also the ‘quality’ of that space – who is nearby

at any one time, who is moving through that bar, or club, or train or service station. Indeed, it is the movement through physical space that provides the most enjoyment (Mowlabocus, 2010, emphasis in original text).

Like Mowlabocus, I understand hybrid spaces as rearticulating the relationships between space, subject and technology that were already there, in that Grindr users are not entering a new space when they sign into the application. Rather, as de Souza e Silva suggests in the above quote, they are bringing the online contexts of Grindr into the physical one that surrounds them, which then has the potential to impact their experience of a particular space. Mowlabocus then adds that for the potentiality of these spaces to be truly realized, the mobility of users is critical while using these technologies in spaces of a certain 'quality'. Although the author fails to explore the certain qualities which make smart phone applications like Grindr appealing, the findings of this research suggest that less frequented places, such as gay bars and clubs, different neighbourhoods and cities, are important places of difference that makes Grindr particularly interesting to use.

In the hybrid-spaces logic, cell phones do not take users out of physical space, as has been suggested by many scholars who have studied mobile devices as voice communication technologies. Conversely, they strengthen users' connections to the space they inhabit, because the connection to other users depends on their relative position in space (de Souza e Silva, 2006).

Conclusion

As society increasingly becomes literally more mobile, as exemplified through the use of iPhone applications, geographers and other social scientists must be prepared to analyze and critique the various ways in which mobility is materialized. As the materiality of mobility evolves and increasingly becomes embedded in our everyday lives, questions emerge as to how these devices and their online applications intersect with our use of physical spaces and

places. When geographers make assumptions about the relationship between online mobile technologies like Grindr and place making anchors such as gay bars/clubs, however, a real opportunity is missed. Through this study we can see an erosion to the determinist argument that use of online spaces negatively affect how physical spaces are used. At the same time, this study and the wealth of literature explored clearly shows a relationship between online mobile technologies and the places and spaces occupied by their users. As the places of gay neighbourhoods become re-articulated within the urban fabric of Western cities, online mobile technologies like Grindr may not necessarily be contributing to their perceived demise, but rather providing opportunities for individualized experiences of these constantly changing spaces.

The work of Mowlabocus and Sanders, in particular, introduced the complexities involved when considering how the use of gay online spaces intersect with use of gay-identified physical spaces. Although their work is not based in a geographical framework or understanding, they present ethnographical findings that contextualize the users of gay online spaces, and explore how use of these spaces is integrated into their everyday lives, including the gay-identified physical spaces that online users also occupy. Mowlabocus and Sanders demonstrate that gay online spaces are utilized in unique ways, and that users integrate their online activities with their everyday uses of physical spaces. This study supports this position, and argues that the uses of online and gay-identified physical spaces are not mutually exclusive, but rather are indeed integrated. Despite being online and connected to nearby users, participants of this study noted how their use of Grindr remained deeply rooted in the physical spaces they occupied.

In their contribution to *Seattle Geographies*, Brown, Wang, and Knopp (2011) argue that Capitol Hill is not and has not been a fixed geographical anchor for the city's queer community:

To queer our notions of a gay neighbourhood, we must consider that sexuality is not fixed in space. To say that Capitol Hill is the queer neighbourhood in Seattle is not to say that it always has been so. It is not to say that other parts of Seattle are not – or have not also been – quite queer. It is not to say that there aren't important and different social geographies of gender that make collapsing men and women into "queer" districts difficult. It is also not to say that Capitol Hill itself is a fixed entity. On the contrary, it is always changing, as is the geography of the GLBTQ community. We want to suggest that it is helpful to consider the historical geography of queer space in Seattle to appreciate that it has always been *moving* (p. 157 emphasis in original).

After detailing the movement of Seattle's queer community throughout the city and the current diffusion of queer folk throughout the region, the authors ask a critical question;

Does this movement, with all of its ubiquity, still need Capitol Hill, a sort of psycho-geographic anchor (however anachronistic), to tether all this diffusion? If that is the case, it becomes even more important to "queer" queer space, as new and multiple ways of claiming space will evolve alongside the urban "gay ghetto".

Following Brown *et al* I want to suggest that geographers re-imagine our gay ghettos as new forms of communication technologies emerge, and, in this case, gay men increasingly integrate their use in their everyday lives. Although there is little doubt that gay neighbourhoods are changing from their former selves, my research suggests that Capitol Hill remains a critical place for Grindr users simply because the program itself is enhanced by the location of its users. Besides being a place that has a concentration of queer venues, gay bars and clubs, bathhouses, while providing the sense of safety that only a neighbourhood with a cupcake shop that sells a cupcake known as

“the Gay” and openly supports pro-marriage equality candidates for political office could, Capitol Hill is also a place where gay men know that their Grindr profile will gain a new audience. In answering the author’s question, it certainly does seem like this movement still needs Capitol Hill, precisely because it is a geographic anchor of not only places, but of other queer folk who can, among other things, be found through online mobile technologies like Grindr. Perhaps part of the re-imagining that needs to occur is a reconsideration of the scale at which geographers see the increased movement of gay men and queer folk in general. While there might be a “diffusion” of queer folk throughout the city and surrounding suburbia, they themselves are not fixed in one location. On the contrary, they often live in one neighbourhood, work in another, and spend their free time somewhere else entirely. Through all of this movement, though, there is an application on their cell phone that provides them with an individualized experience of all the places in which they move.

As geographers continue their work studying gay neighbourhoods and the spaces occupied by non-heterosexuals, I argue that they should remain keenly aware of emerging technologies and their implications on assumptions about spatial implications of online space. This thesis explores how men are using online spaces accessed by mobile technologies and their interactions with surrounding gay identified physical spaces. Geographers might, *should*, expand on this work to explore other online spaces/mobile applications used by men looking to meet other men in order to provide more insight into the findings of this study. A key conclusion of this study is that there is a strong interplay between Grindr as an online space and the physical space of the users. Other studies might complicate this understanding by exploring other applications/online spaces, investigating

specific devices, or taking on a project on a greater scale. Lastly, geographers should not limit this type of work to non-heterosexual communities, but rather should broaden it to other communities and online spaces created through mobile technologies. With many online spaces having locational services as a key component of their use, online and physical spaces appear to be integrating through un-imaged ways. As geographers consider the changing landscape of our built environment, there must be a concerted effort to understand how society's use of emerging mobile technologies intersect with the surrounding physical environment.

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Appendix A: Survey Questions and Results

How old are you?

25-31	29.03% (18)
18-24	25.81% (16)
39-45	16.13% (10)
32-38	16.13% (10)
53-59	8.06% (5)
46-52	4.84% (3)

What is the zip code of your current residence?

Zip code data provided in appendix B

Please select the income group that best describes you. If you are retired, unemployed, or a student please select those options otherwise please choose from the income group options.

Over \$100,000	24.19% (15)
\$15,000 - \$30,000	16.13% (10)
Full time Student	14.52% (9)
\$30,000 - \$45,000	12.90% (8)
\$60,000 - \$80,000	9.68% (6)
Less than \$15,000	8.06% (5)
\$45,000 - \$60,000	4.84% (3)
\$80,000 - \$100,000	4.84% (3)
Unemployed	4.84% (3)
Retired	0.00% (0)

What is your current living situation?

I live alone	40.32% (25)
I live with one or more roommates	30.65% (19)
I live with my significant other	19.35% (12)
I live with parents and/or family	8.06% (5)
Other	1.61% (1)

What is your relationship status?

Single	50.00% (31)
In long term relationship	25.81% (16)
Dating	16.13% (10)
Married/Civil Union	3.23% (2)
Other	4.84% (3)

What best describes your identified sex?

Male	88.71% (55)
Queer	8.06% (5)
FTM	1.61% (1)
MTF	0.00% (0)
Other	1.61% (1)

How do you identify your sexual orientation?

Gay	83.61% (51)
Queer	8.20% (5)
Bi	6.56% (4)
Straight	0.00% (0)
Other	1.64% (1)

Did not respond: 1

How many of your male friends identify as gay/queer/bi/non-heterosexual?

Most	56.45% (35)
Some	25.81% (16)
A few	11.29% (7)
All	6.45% (4)

How much of your free time is spent with gay/queer/bi/non-heterosexual men?

A lot	46.77% (29)
Some	37.10% (23)
A little	16.13% (10)
None	0.00% (0)

Where do you usually go out when you go to gay bars/clubs? (Check all that apply)

Capitol Hill (Seattle)	90.16% (55)
Other	13.11% (8)
Downtown Tacoma	8.20% (5)
Downtown Everett	3.28% (2)
Downtown Kent	0.00% (0)
Greenwood neighbourhood*	0.00% (0)

Did not respond: 1

*The researcher mistakenly wrote “Greenwood” when “Wallingford” was the correct neighbourhood.

Which of the following have you met through gay bars and/or clubs? (Check all that apply)

New friends	77.59% (45)
Casual sex partner (one night stand)	63.79% (37)
Regular sex partner (friends with ben)	39.66% (23)
New long-term partner (partner, lover)	37.93% (22)
Other	6.90% (4)
Did not respond:	4

How much of your free time is spent on Capitol Hill?

A little	41.94% (26)
A lot	32.26% (20)
Some	19.35% (12)
None	6.45% (4)

How often do you go to gay venues and events (such as gay bars/clubs, bathhouses, gay organizations/clubs)?

Less than once a week	50.00% (31)
Once or twice a week	32.26% (20)
3-5 times a week	11.29% (7)
More than 5 times a week	3.23% (2)
Never	3.23% (2)

Why do you go to gay bars/clubs? (Check all that apply)

To have fun with friends	83.87% (52)
Meet other men for friendship	46.77% (29)
For the music	41.94% (26)
Meet other men for relationship	38.71% (24)
Meet other men for casual sex	37.10% (23)
I don't go to gay bars/clubs	14.52% (9)
Other	4.84% (3)

Overall, my experiences of the Seattle 'gay scene' (including gay bars/clubs, the Capitol Hill neighbourhood, and gay organizations/clubs) have been disappointing.

Disagree	46.77% (29)
Agree	38.71% (24)
Strongly agree	9.68% (6)
Strongly disagree	4.84% (3)

I am concerned that someone I know from work/school may see me at a gay bar/club

Strongly disagree	72.58% (45)
Disagree	20.97% (13)
Agree	4.84% (3)
Strongly agree	1.61% (1)

I feel confident about approaching men at gay venues (such as gay bars/clubs, bathhouses, and gay organisations/groups).

Disagree	45.16% (28)
Agree	29.03% (18)
Strongly agree	17.74% (11)
Strongly disagree	8.06% (5)

Capitol Hill is Seattle's gay neighbourhood.

Strongly agree	61.29% (38)
Agree	33.87% (21)
Disagree	4.84% (3)
Strongly disagree	0.00% (0)

Capitol Hill is the only Puget Sound area neighbourhood where I feel comfortable being openly gay/queer/bi/non-heterosexual.

Disagree	51.61% (32)
Strongly disagree	25.81% (16)
Agree	16.13% (10)
Strongly agree	6.45% (4)

I prefer going to gay bars/clubs outside Capitol Hill.

Disagree	69.35% (43)
Agree	19.35% (12)
Strongly disagree	8.06% (5)
Strongly agree	3.23% (2)

I prefer going to gay bars/clubs on Capitol Hill

Agree	61.67% (37)
Strongly agree	20.00% (12)
Disagree	15.00% (9)
Strongly disagree	3.33% (2)

Did not respond: 2

Going to gay bars/clubs is an important way for me to meet other gay men in the Seattle area.

Disagree	49.18% (30)
Agree	32.79% (20)
Strongly agree	11.48% (7)
Strongly (dis)agree*	6.56% (4)
Did not respond:	1

*This question listed “Strongly agree” twice. One “Strongly agree” option was located where “Strongly disagree” had been located throughout the survey. Responses received for this “Strongly agree” option are noted here by “Strongly (dis)agree”. It is possible that survey respondents recognized the error and selected it as if it said “Strongly disagree”.

I prefer going to straight or mixed (straight, gay, bi) bars/clubs on Capitol Hill.

Disagree	51.61% (32)
Strongly disagree	29.03% (18)
Agree	16.13% (10)
Strongly agree	3.23% (2)

I prefer going to straight or mixed (straight, gay, bi) bars/clubs not on Capitol Hill.

Disagree	50.00% (31)
Agree	24.19% (15)
Strongly disagree	20.97% (13)
Strongly agree	4.84% (3)

When did you first start using Grindr?

1-2 years ago	43.55% (27)
Less than 6 months ago	25.81% (16)
6-12 months ago	24.19% (15)
More than 2 years ago	6.45% (4)

What have you used Grindr for? (Check all that apply)

Just looking/surfing	87.10% (54)
Chat	77.42% (48)
Meet men for casual sex	56.45% (35)
Meet men for a possible relationship	46.77% (29)
Stay connected with friends	38.71% (24)
Meet the same man/men for sex on a regular basis	22.58% (14)

Online sex ('cybersex') 20.97% (13)

What are you seeking on Grindr? (Check all that apply)

Chat	67.21% (41)
Friend(s)	63.93% (39)
Meet other men	59.02% (36)
Casual sex partners	55.74% (34)
A boyfriend/partner/lover	52.46% (32)
Men I can meet up with regularly for sex	45.90% (28)
Group sex	26.23% (16)
Online sex ('cybersex') partners	14.75% (9)
Other	8.20% (5)
Did not respond:	1

Who have you met through Grindr? (Check all that apply)

Chat buddies	59.32% (35)
Casual sex partners	57.63% (34)
New friends	57.63% (34)
Men to meet with on a regular basis for sex	27.12% (16)
Regular partner (boyfriend, lover)	16.95% (10)
Other	8.47% (5)
Did not respond:	3

Why did you first start using Grindr? (Check all that apply)

My friends were using it/talking about it	64.52% (40)
I thought it was a good way to get to know new people	48.39% (30)
It sounded like an easy way to cruise for sex	35.48% (22)
I heard about it through the media (newspapers, magazines, TV, radio)	24.19% (15)
It sounded like a safe way to cruise for sex	17.74% (11)
I wanted sex right away	16.13% (10)
Other	8.06% (5)
I was tired of meeting men in bars/clubs/sex clubs	4.84% (3)

How long after you started using Grindr did you have your first face to face meeting with a man you met on Grindr?

More than 1 month	27.42% (17)
Less than 1 month	25.81% (16)
Haven't met anyone face to face though Grindr	24.19% (15)
Less than 1 week	16.13% (10)
Less than 1 day	6.45% (4)

Apart from Grindr, where else do you meet other gay men for friendship, relationship, or casual sex? (Check all that apply)

Friends of friends	82.26% (51)
Internet websites (such as www.adam4adam.com , www.manhunt.net , and www.plentyoffish.com)	75.81% (47)
Gay bars/clubs	69.35% (43)
Private house parties	50.00% (31)
Work	40.32% (25)
School	35.48% (22)
Other smart phone applications (such as Scruff, BoyAhoy, and Jack'd)	33.87% (21)
Sex cruising locations (such as public bathrooms, parks, bathhouses, sex theaters, and sex parties)	24.19% (15)
Other	8.06% (5)
I only use Grindr	3.23% (2)

Besides Grindr, what other smart phone applications do you use to chat with other men? (Check all that apply)

BoyAhoy	3.57% (2)
DowneLink	0.00% (0)
Jack'd	19.64% (11)
Scruff	35.71% (20)
Bender	0.00% (0)
Recon	10.71% (6)
Purpll	1.79% (1)
Gaydar	7.14% (4)
GROWLr	1.79% (1)
Manhunt	33.93% (19)
I only use Grindr	35.71% (20)
Other	10.71% (6)

Did not respond: 6

Do you use gay chat/dating websites (such as www.adam4adam.com, www.manhunt.net, www.squirt.org, etc.) to meet other gay men?

Yes	70.97% (44)
No	29.03% (18)

In the past 6 months, how many different men have you met face to face (that you originally met through Grindr) for either sex, dating, or friendship?

2-5 men	41.94% (26)
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None	29.03% (18)
One	14.52% (9)
6-10 men	11.29% (7)
11-20 men	1.61% (1)
More than 20 men	1.61% (1)

How many of your male friends use Grindr?

Some	40.32% (25)
A few	38.71% (24)
Most	17.74% (11)
None	3.23% (2)
All	0.00% (0)

How often do you use Grindr?

Every day	30.65% (19)
A few times a week	29.03% (18)
Less than once a month	16.13% (10)
Less than once a week	14.52% (9)
About once a week	9.68% (6)

Where do you log on to Grindr? (Check all that apply)

At my home	95.16% (59)
At cafes	62.90% (39)
In other cities	58.06% (36)
On public transit	56.45% (35)
At work	54.84% (34)
Walking	53.23% (33)
While out at gay bars/clubs	51.61% (32)
At someone else's home	43.55% (27)
At school	29.03% (18)
At private house parties	25.81% (16)
Other	6.45% (4)

Do you pay for Grindr Xtra?

No	80.65% (50)
Yes	19.35% (12)

While on Grindr, do you show your approximate distance from other users? In other words, when users look at your profile are they able to see that you are X miles away from them?

Yes	87.10% (54)
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No	8.06% (5)
I don't know	4.84% (3)

Where do you meet men face to face who you have met through Grindr
(Check all that apply)

Public places (such as street corners, cafes, restaurants, etc) not on Capitol Hill	52.46% (32)
Public places (such as street corners, cafes, restaurants, etc) on Capitol Hill	49.18% (30)
His House	39.34% (24)
Your House	37.70% (23)
Gay bars/clubs	26.23% (16)
I have not met someone face to face who I first met on Grindr	19.67% (12)
Other	4.92% (3)
Bathhouse	1.64% (1)
Did not respond: 1	

Most men I meet face to face on Grindr become casual sex partners (one time or on a regular basis)

Disagree	24.19% (15)
I have not met someone face to face who I first met on Grindr	24.19% (15)
Agree	22.58% (14)
Strongly disagree	20.97% (13)
Strongly agree	8.06% (5)

Since I started using Grindr I no longer look for casual sexual partners (one time or on a regular basis) elsewhere.

Disagree	47.54% (29)
Strongly disagree	34.43% (21)
Agree	9.84% (6)
Strongly agree	8.20% (5)
Did not respond: 1	

Most men I meet face to face on Grindr become friends I keep in touch with on a regular basis.

Disagree	45.90% (28)
I have not met someone face to face who I first met on Grindr	21.31% (13)
Agree	19.67% (12)

Strongly disagree	11.48% (7)
Strongly agree	1.64% (1)
Did not respond: 1	

Since I started using Grindr I no longer look for friends elsewhere.

Strongly disagree	69.35% (43)
Disagree	29.03% (18)
Agree	1.61% (1)
Strongly agree	0.00% (0)

Most men I meet face to face on Grindr become boyfriends/lovers

Strongly disagree	46.77% (29)
Disagree	25.81% (16)

I have not met someone face to face who I first met on Grindr

	24.19% (15)
Strongly agree	3.23% (2)
Agree	0.00% (0)

Since I started using Grindr I no longer look for boyfriends/lovers elsewhere.

Strongly disagree	62.90% (39)
Disagree	33.87% (21)
Agree	1.61% (1)
Strongly agree	1.61% (1)

I prefer meeting men through Grindr than through gay chat websites (such as www.adam4adam.com, www.manhunt.net, www.squirt.org, etc).

Disagree	55.00% (33)
Agree	30.00% (18)
Strongly disagree	11.67% (7)
Strongly agree	3.33% (2)

Did not respond: 2

I prefer meeting men through Grindr than through gay venues (such as gay bars/clubs, bathhouses, gay organizations/groups).

Disagree	56.45% (35)
Strongly disagree	20.97% (13)
Agree	17.74% (11)
Strongly agree	4.84% (3)

I am concerned that someone I know from work/school may see my profile on Grindr.

Strongly disagree	45.16% (28)
Disagree	38.71% (24)
Agree	12.90% (8)
Strongly agree	3.23% (2)

In order to remain anonymous on Grindr I do not post a picture of my face and/or include any identifying information in my profile.

Strongly disagree	48.39% (30)
Disagree	27.42% (17)
Agree	17.74% (11)
Strongly agree	6.45% (4)

Since using Grindr my social life and circle of friends has expanded.

Disagree	41.94% (26)
Agree	37.10% (23)
Strongly disagree	19.35% (12)
Strongly agree	1.61% (1)

I consider my experiences on Grindr to be part of my broader experience of the Seattle 'gay scene'

Agree	50.00% (31)
Disagree	29.03% (18)
Strongly disagree	14.52% (9)
Strongly agree	6.45% (4)

Overall, my experience in using Grindr has been disappointing.

Agree	40.32% (25)
Disagree	38.71% (24)
Strongly agree	11.29% (7)
Strongly disagree	9.68% (6)

I feel confident about contacting men through Grindr.

Agree	57.38% (35)
Disagree	29.51% (18)
Strongly agree	9.84% (6)
Strongly disagree	3.28% (2)
Did not respond:	1

My use of Grindr is an important way for me to meet other gay men in the Seattle area.

Agree	37.70% (23)
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Disagree	36.07% (22)
Strongly disagree	19.67% (12)
Strongly agree	6.56% (4)
Did not respond:	1

Most men on Grindr are honest about who they are.

Agree	45.16% (28)
Disagree	40.32% (25)
Strongly disagree	11.29% (7)
Strongly agree	3.23% (2)

Appendix B: Reported Zip Codes

Reported Zip Code (number of participants reporting) and County of zip code.

98418 (1)	Pierce
98409 (1)	Pierce
98406 (1)	Pierce
98405 (2)	Pierce
98290 (1)	Snohomish
98275 (1)	Snohomish
98195 (1)	King
98178 (1)	King
98155 (1)	King
98144 (3)	King
98125 (3)	King
98122 (9)	King
98121 (1)	King
98115 (1)	King
98112 (3)	King
98109 (3)	King
98106 (2)	King
98105 (7)	King
98104 (2)	King
98103 (1)	King
98102 (5)	King
98101 (2)	King
98092 (2)	King

98052 (2)	King
98039 (1)	King
98034 (1)	King
98029 (1)	King
98015 (1)	King
98012 (1)	Snohomish
98003 (1)	King

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Personal Background

- Age?
- Approximately where do you live?
- What is your living situation like?
- Are you originally from Seattle? If not, where are you from?
- How long have you lived in Seattle?
- Describe what you do for a living?

Identity

- How do you identify your sex?
- How do you identify your sexual orientation?
- Do you know others who share your sexual orientation?
 - o If yes, how do you know them? Where do you find others who share your sexual orientation?

Use of gay spaces

- In general, what has been your experience of the Seattle area gay community?
 - o Where have you made gay friends? Where do you usually spend time with gay friends?
 - o How do you feel about going out to gay bars/clubs?
 - o What do you think about the Seattle 'gay scene'?
- Do you go out to gay bars and clubs on Capitol Hill?
 - o If no, why not?
 - o If yes, where do you like to go and what is generally the purpose of going?
- How frequently do you go to Capitol Hill?
 - o When you do go, what is the general purpose of your visits?
 - o If you live in Capitol Hill, why did you choose to live there?

- Do you volunteer or work with any gay oriented health or social organizations?
 - o If yes, what do you do? Where are they located?
- Do you ever attend events hosted by gay organizations on Capitol Hill or use the services of gay organizations such as health clinics on Capitol Hill?
- Would you consider Capitol Hill an important neighborhood for the Seattle area gay community?
 - o If no, why not?
 - o If yes, why?
- Are there places outside Capitol Hill that are important to the Seattle area gay community?
 - o If so, where?
- In a typical week, can you point for me on this map (map of Seattle area) where you usually travel to? Gold = Home, Green = Work/School, Silver = Free time/social time.

Use of Grindr

- In general, what has been your experience using Grindr?
 - o When did you start using Grindr? Why?
 - o When you sign on to Grindr, what is your main purpose for doing so?
 - o Have you met men face to face using Grindr? If so, what was the purpose for meeting?
 - o Have you made friends through Grindr?
 - o When you chat on Grindr, what do you usually chat about?
- Where do you usually sign on to Grindr?
- Where did you first hear about Grindr?
- How does Grindr impact your social life offline?

- What kind of relationships have you developed through Grindr?
- Do you use other smart phone applications that are similar to Grindr?
 - Do you use these other applications similarly to your use of Grindr? If not, why not?
- Do you use websites such as www.adam4adam.com, www.manhunt.net, or www.squirt.org to meet other gay men?
 - If yes, how are these websites different from Grindr? Do you prefer Grindr over these types of websites?
- Do you prefer to meet men on Grindr as opposed to gay bars/clubs?

Concluding thoughts or comments?