Grindr casual hook-ups as interactional achievements

Christian Licoppe, Carole Anne Rivière and Julien Morel

Telecom ParisTech, France; Université Paris Saclay, France

Abstract

One pervasive use of the Grindr mobile application is the initiation and accomplishment of pseudonymous sexual encounters between gay strangers based on location awareness. Not only are such encounters oriented towards quasi-immediate sexual gratification, but they are collaboratively done so as to preclude repeat encounters and relational development, with the protagonists supposedly left unaffected emotionally, relationally and socially by their meeting. This creates a rather special – and analytically interesting – interactional dilemma when Grindr users initiate a social contact with potential partners, usually through the chat function integrated into the mobile app. This article describes the way Grindr users have developed a particular 'linguistic ideology', which casts ordinary conversation as an interactional activity that is performed between (potential) friends and enables relational development. As such, it is unsuitable for one-time sexual encounters, the production of which is a distinctive and accountable interactional accomplishment. This article analyzes the special interactional practices based on profile-matching sequences which Grindr users have developed to circumvent the relational affordances of electronic conversation. These practices constitute Grindr users as a particular form of speech community, adjusted both to their orientation towards initiating 'purely' sexual encounters and to the socio-material design of the Grindr mobile application.

Keywords

Chat, conversation, dating, gay, hook-up device, mobile communication, mobility, proximity awareness, social network

Introduction

One important use, if not the main use, of location-aware mobile applications is to provide users with location-related information about other persons with whom they may

Corresponding author:
Christian Licoppe, Department of Social Science, Telecom ParisTech, 46 rue Barrault, 75013, Paris, France.
Email: christian.licoppe@telecom-paristech.fr

interact both on screen and 'in real life' (Farman, 2012), shaping places as layered 'hybrid ecologies' (Crabtree and Rodden, 2008) in which the relational implications of proximity awareness play a central role in the initiation of social encounters (Licoppe and Inada, 2010). They have more recently been integrated into mobile social networking platforms (De Souza e Silva and Frith, 2010; De Souza e Silva and Sutko, 2009), such as Dodgeball (Humphreys, 2007; 2010) or Foursquare (Frith, 2012, 2013; Licoppe and Legout, 2014) and Facebook, with limited commercial success. However, location awareness as a relational resource seems to have garnered more user interest in the case of more specialized mobile social networking applications oriented towards initiating encounters between strangers of the dating kind, whether for romantic relationships or casual hook-ups. Grindr has led the way in the gay community, and more recently. mobile applications such as Tinder in North America and Europe, and Momo in China, have followed suit for a more heterosexual population. Grindr has been the object of recent studies, which describe how, while it may still be used for different purposes, it is still massively used for casual sexual hook-ups, making users very sensitive to the way they present themselves on such applications (Blackwell et al., 2014), so that it has been described as an 'online hook-up device' (Race, 2015). While other types of use are observable (Woo, 2013), users who are less interested in the accumulation of sexual encounters with strangers tend to quit these applications after a while (Brubaker et al., 2014). We will pay special attention in this qualitative study to the way the interactional practices through which online casual hook-ups are accomplished are shaped by location awareness, the design of the mobile application, the use of mobile terminals, and communication- and profile-related resources, in a way which is distinctive both from earlier behaviour in public areas or even online hook-up practices on dating websites such as Gaydar (see, for instance, Light et al., 2008; Mowlabocus, 2010).

Casual hook-ups on Grindr involve a characteristic 'sexual script' (Bayart, 2014; Gagnon and Simon, 1973), in which (a) the sexual encounter involves unknown strangers, who are attractive in part because they are strangers; (b) these potential partners are apprehended through a set of objectified attributes and characteristics (pictures, profiles, sexual preferences, etc.); (c) the sexual encounter is expected to be short-lived, with no repeat, and thus not develop into a relationship or lead to personal entanglements (of course this may happen, but it is rather rare and unexpected and then the whole thing becomes something else altogether). As such, social mingling on Grindr appears as a repetition of similar encounters among a wealth of potential new partners made visible through the mobile application. It is often described as a consumption process, targeting others framed as objectified commodities (often referred to as 'meat' or 'fresh meat'). Such a consumption process involves a set of practices metaphorically evoked as 'hunting' or 'fishing' for new people with whom to initiate encounters with similarly oriented gay strangers conceived of as 'preys'. Grindr has thus reinforced and reshaped the particular 'sexual script' of casual hook-up (Race, 2014), which was already a significant part of male gay sexual practices and led to their colonization of public places in large cities (Chauncey, 1996; Humphreys, 1975). Grindrhas also led to a privatization of this particular scenario in which potential partners may be gathered or 'fished' in the course of everyday mobilities and the encounter may subsequently be organized from, and in the home (Licoppe et al., 2015): Instead of securing some sort of 'privacy' in public

places for the initiation and management of fleeting sexual encounters (Chauncey, 1996), Grindr users introduce some amount of publicity into the home by turning it into a place to meet strangers.

Such a script carves an ideal type for a very particular case of social encounter, in which participants display an ostensive lack of concern with the development of any form of relationship. It is this which precisely makes it possible to view such encounters as 'purely' sexual, as opposed to more 'social' encounters. As the sociology of markets has shown, producing one-shot transactions between strangers requires considerable 'framing work' (Callon, 1998). Race has shown how this 'framing-overflowing' model could be extended to the production of sexual encounters with strangers, and indicated how research should focus on the work of producing encounters as recognizable casual hook-ups (Race, 2014). This has allowed him to point towards the way the socio-material design of digital applications could be more or less congenial to the framing of intimate encounters as casual hook-ups. We build on these insights to discuss here how, while a reliance on location awareness promotes one off-sexual encounters, the need to initiate encounters through (digital) talk, which is a characteristic of online and mobile applications (as opposed to gay encounters in public places for instance), involves some specific framing work and interactional practices, for the conventional modes of social interaction, such as conversation, are heavily biased towards cooperation and relational build-up (Enfield and Levinson, 2006). To show this, we will empirically focus on the initiation of Grindr encounters through the communication platform integrated into the Grindr mobile application. We will show how their particular concerns make Grindr users develop what anthropologists have called a 'linguistic ideology' about ordinary conversation and social networking, a 'linguistic ideology' being a set of 'beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use' (Silverstein, 1979: 193). Linguistic ideologies index the interests of particular communities and a normative repertoire relevant to the choice of a particular form of language or discourse, or what a proper way to talk might be in a given set of circumstances. We will show how Grindr users become reflexively and acutely aware of how ordinary conversation in general and in the more specific form of electronic conversations on social networking platforms enables relationships and 'affords' sociality, and how such an orientation is unsuitable to the purpose of initiating a 'purely' sexual encounter with a stranger, leading them to develop specific patterns of electronic interaction.

The Grindr application

Grindr is a mobile social networking application based on location awareness. Users fill in a profile which becomes accessible through the website, which is biased towards physical appearance (age, weight, height, ethnic origin, interest, relational status) and includes a photograph and tagline. This profile becomes visible to other users, based on spatial proximity (or independently of proximity if declared a 'favourite'). When a user connects to the website, he sees a mosaic of other profiles, ranked mostly according to spatial proximity (Figure 1). As he moves, his homepage evolves accordingly, displaying transient, mobility-driven arrays of potential partners. The salience of the proximity

Figure 1. One of our users' typical Grindr homepage after connection (as photographed during an interview).

Figure 2. (a) A prior chat window, and (b) salient functionalities of the chat, for sending pictures or a clickable geolocalized map figuring the user's location.

index in the homepage strongly links potential encounters with spatial proximity. Until the user launches the application again, the contacts who have 'appeared' in the course of prior mobilities will remain visible in the list, although they may appear at varying distances according to the users' displacements.

When the user elects to click on one of the pictures, the profile and spatial distance of that person become visible, and a mobile chat application may be launched from there. That mobile chat application includes two special functions of interest materialized as specific one-click affordances, that is, the possibility of sending pictures and one's location (through a map figuring one's location, as in Figure 2).

Table 1. Sample composition according to age and living conditions.

Age	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–55	Total
Number	4	7	6	6	23
(Living with partner)	(1)	(3)	(4)	(4)	(12)

Although its design infrastructure is broader (it is similar to other mobile social networking applications), Grindr's is mostly used as a mobile dating application, mobile both in the sense of being accessible on smartphones (which makes it usable in mobility settings) and in the fact that spatial proximity (achieved through mobility practices) enables potential contacts. In the initial phase in which users browse potential partners, the key features are pictures, proximity awareness (embedded in the spatial organization of pictures in the homepage) and profiles (which include spatial distance). Initial contact is made through the chat and as electronic conversation.

Fieldwork

We recruited 23 male users of Grindr through an ad in a well-known gay publication. Participants were chosen so as to represent a variety of age groups, with some living alone and some living with a partner (Table 1). We conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with all of them, lasting about 2 hours. These semi-structured interviews were focused on the participants' uses of Grindr, and on the elicitation of detailed narratives about concrete situations and interactional practices. During the interviews, the participants were also invited to launch the Grindr application and to navigate the site while commenting that experience to the interviewer in order for us to get a more concrete and situated perspective on what they do. All but two of our interviewees were using the freeware version of the application.

Out of these 23 users, 4 agreed to be involved in a more thorough research protocol over a period of 1 to 2 weeks. A video recording application was installed on their phone, which they could choose to launch to record their mobile screen activity during extended sequences of mobile phone use in which they used Grindr. Three users agreed to record their smartphone activity on Grindr in this way. This provided us with (a) a sense of the settings in which they used Grindr (through the audio); (b) a sense of how users might switch from one thread of activity to another on Grindr, or between the use of Grindr and other smartphone-based activities (which would be directly observable on the video) or outside the smartphone (which would be indirectly observable through the stillness of the recoded mobile screen); and (c) rich data on the production of messaging-mediated encounters, recorded as they actually unfolded in time.

Proximity awareness and the management of casual hook-ups

While some users may engage at time into the use of Grindr just to browse or chat, in a 'time-wasting' or 'endless chattering' fashion (Woo, 2013), the quick organizing of

casual hook-ups still remains the dominant orientation of Grindr users. Those who stray away from such a pattern describe a sort of collective pressure, which may be expressed in remarks or communication cutoffs from the other users they get in contact with. They feel accountable for not going for casual hook-ups:

> 'I found it (Grindr) was very simple and it was really for the consumption of fast sexual encounters. Even if, in the beginning, one has the impression that one may find all types of relationships, one realizes that most are only looking for sexual relationships'. (S., 31 years old)

Casual hook-ups can be considered as a dominant among Grindr users' orientation and we will focus here on the way cultural orientations, the socio-material design of the app and interaction patterns enable or constrain such an orientation.

Users who are oriented towards immediate sexual encounters describe themselves as oriented towards the satisfaction of a demanding inner sexual drive:

> 'to me not to do anything (sexually), it's a frustration. I am not saying do it all the time and live only in a state of avidity. But for me there is something sound in responding to one's impulses. If I don't respond to my impulses, I will accumulate something in me, and it won't go well. When you are very much sex-oriented, it's the way it is, and guys are like that. For me if it's only sex, it's not unhealthy, even if you are with a regular partner. How many times have I fucked with guys whose name and age I did not know? I did not care. That's the reality of sex when it is bare and animal. Grindr, it's mostly this'. (R., 45 years old)

Such descriptions essentialize the sex drive and place its source inside the person. Quick encounters with strangers appear as a way to release such sexual tensions through immediate sexual gratification. There is a particular word in French to describe them, '*plans cul*' or just '*plan*', which I will translate here as 'one night stand' although they often do not happen at night.

Such sexual encounters target strangers framed as commodities (metaphors of consumption or 'meat market' are pervasive). Finding potential partners is seen as the matching of objectified features such as physical appearance (made available through the exchange of pictures), sexual proclivities and proximity (made available through the exchange of self-localizing maps). Such encounters are framed as 'purely' sexual, with minimum conversation, and one-time only (repeats are the exception). They are expected to leave participants relationally and emotionally unaffected (besides 'pure' sexual release), and not to evolve into any kind of 'relationship' (these characteristics all need to be present for the encounter to count as 'purely' sexual). The encounter must therefore develop within a bubble, dissociated from all the other domains of social conduct of the participants, which it supposedly does not affect, and vice versa. This involves specific 'insulation work' on the part of the participants in order to make this plausible. Moreover, such an encounter is oriented only towards an immediate gratification and it allegedly does not contribute to any form of subjectification. Within the insulated domain of sexual experience governed by this script, 'life' appears as a repetition of similar sexual encounters which leaves their protagonists possibly sexually satisfied but unchanged.

Such a framing of sexual encounters with strangers is not something completely new in urban gay male communities. It actually builds on practices which were part of the

20th-century gay culture and which have been well documented in the second half of the 20th century. The sites for such fleeting sexual encounters between gay strangers (which were also often stigmatized and/or illegal) were often urban public places, such as bars and saunas known as 'gay' places (Achilles, 1967), or general purpose public places which could be colonized at certain moments of the day, such as beaches, parks or even public toilets (Humphreys, 1975), Chauncey, 1996). Initial ethnographic studies insisted on the importance of gaze and embodied conduct and the minimization of talk as resources in the management of such sexual encounters between strangers. Sexual encounters on Grindr can be seen as a 'remediation' of such practices on a mobile social networking platform. However, such a remediation entails a massive transformation of the practice, the initiation and occurrence of which have been unrooted from urban public locales, which active Grindr users now describe as uncomfortable (particularly open air places in bad weather), uncertain (one is not sure whom one will find there) and potentially unsafe, to the home. In that respect, Grindr can be seen to lead to a 'privatization' of gay sexual encounters with strangers (Licoppe et al., in press).

However massive such a transformation might be, the remediation by Grindr of older practices involved in anonymous sex within male gay communities cannot be reduced only to the move from public to private places. First Grindr encounters involve 'pseudonymous strangers', for whom individualized online profiles are available, even if often sketchy, rather than anonymous strangers as was mostly the case with gay cruising in public places. Second, proximity awareness, which is salient in the design of the main user interfaces (in the ranking of pictures on one's homepage, and as a changing element in the profile of potential partners), is used to narrow down the spatio-temporal frame of potential encounters. Users perceive themselves as exploiting proximity awareness to focus on the proximity of potential partners and the immediacy of the encounters:

> The geolocation, it sometimes makes people dumb. People get obsessed with that criterion. It's like, well you live more than one mile away from me, or even more than half a mile, then we don't talk. Some have told me: well no, you're too far away, I'm not speaking to you. And some even include it in their profile: 'at more than one kilometer I won't move'. (S., 31 years old)

Such a focus on immediate availability (as made visible in interface design) seems even to go as far as to mediate the sexual impulse, which was understood to be a pure inner drive at the origin of such encounters:

> Just the fact of knowing, right, that you have three guys, four guys within a radius of 500 meters, a distance you can easily walk, will perhaps make you tell yourself, well, I might do a one-night stand right now, more than if they were two kilometers away. The distance, the proximity enables the arousal. Proximity, if there is some feeling, it may work. It arouses, it creates desire. (A., 23 years old)

The agency of desire is not immune to the socio-material properties of the situations and frames in which potential objects of desire may appear.

One should also note here that proximity awareness also remediates the concept of the 'familiar stranger' as used in Urban Studies (Milgram, 1974). Although a fuller discussion lies beyond the scope of this article, Grindr enables the repetitive sighting of connected

users in the neighbourhood, affording the possibility of mutual recognition and the development of a relationship of 'pseudonymous familiar strangeness' which may or may not branch into a hook-up in the long run.

Sexual encounters and the respecification of ordinary conversation

Once a potential partner has been identified, contact is almost always initiated through the medium of the messaging application which is incorporated in Grindr. The initial stages of the encounters are thus accomplished through the medium of electronic conversation (instead of gaze and gestures in the case of gay sexual encounters in public places). This is another way in which the socio-materiality of the application contributes to the shaping of the interaction and to specific tensions in the accomplishment of the encounter, for electronic conversation may not be a good ecological environment for the development of precisely that kind of encounter. For instance, Grindr users discriminate sharply between different ways of handling conversations. This is particularly true with those who use the application to initiate online conversations and thus 'resist' the one-night-stand-dominant cultural frame for the use of Grindr:

> For me I use it (Grindr) as a chat. It's to talk. It's already happened to me to talk with the same person for several hours without actually meeting him face to face … most of the time, however, it's very short (on Grindr) for people are just looking for 'plans' (one-night stands), so one shortens the talk. There's just one person with whom I talk regularly but haven't met … It's a friendly relationship … It's really friendly, we talk about what we do, where we go out, what we will do for our holidays. (G., 33 years old)

Such a quote establishes a contrast between the way users mainly interact on Grindr and the form of chat conversation which is a more general feature of online communication: (a) the typical Grindr exchange is very short, while the chat conversation may unfold over months; (b) chat conversations are 'friendly', and involve participants on a friendly basis and potentially support the development of friendly relationships. The typical Grindr contact does not involve participants as friends but as hunters and 'preys':

> If I want to talk, me I don't need to go on Grindr to talk. It's for sexual quickies […] If I see you in my head as a sexual prey, I can't imagine you one second as a friend. That is the way it is.

There is therefore a sharp contrast between the commonsense meanings of (electronic) 'conversations' as a practice, and the specific orientations of many initial social contacts on Grindr. Opening sequences of social contacts on Grindr may be done in and as electronic conversation, but it is done as talk not (just) 'to talk', as with everyday conversations.

In everyday conversation, the development of friendly relationships relies on various references to, requests for, and mentions and provisions of personal information about individual interests and current events (e.g. where one plans to go out, where one is planning to go on vacation, etc.). Such information is not only personal but also relates to people as unfolding trails of individual experiences. The conversation itself is part of this

unfolding experience and a resource for relational development. Mentioning and exchanging such personal facts provide occasions for the entangling of the participants' biographies in the course of everyday conversations, whether electronic or not, and support relational development, in particular the potential transformation of strangers and vague acquaintances into friends, or the simple maintenance of relationships. Orienting to Grindr within that conversational–relational orientation rather than as a reservoir of 'preys' for fast consumption is the fact of a disillusioned minority, constantly experiencing rejections based on their 'particular' (in this setting) interactional expectations:

> (On Grindr) you've got to put a stop to them. I tell them (typical Grindr users) 'I'm not like that'. I get rejected but it does not matter if you get rejected. Some of them are telling you 'but I wanted a quick thing', you let it drop, that's no harm in that. (E., 43 years old)

The dominant use of Grindr involves an orientation towards the production of encounters as soon as possible, leading to fast sexual gratification and without any relational follow-up. Therefore, Grindr users are confronted with an interactional quandary, which accounts for their particularly acute awareness of what everyday conversation is about. Everyday conversation appears as an unsuitable medium for the production of the kind of sexual interactional scenario they are aiming for. The interactional problem is that to manage such encounters, the design of the application constrains them to use a mobile chat, and that the cultural affordances and general use of chat as a medium for interaction support the relationality of everyday conversation.

Moreover, they are themselves everyday conversationalists, for everyday conversation is a kind of primordial site for human interaction (Enfield and Levinson, 2006). As Harold Garfinkel puts it, we are all the time 100% conversationalists. There is no 'time out' from conversation. So, not only must Grindr users develop distinctive patterns of interaction, but they must work continuously to use these patterns of interaction to remain within the kind of recognizable social encounter they want to produce and resist reverting to the relationality and friendliness of everyday conversation which threaten to subvert their project at every juncture. The following quote gives us a first glimpse of these distinctive patterns of interaction contrasting what one does on Grindr with what one used to do on web-based dating sites:

> Before with dating sites in Lyon, I was focusing only on two or three conversations but with good exchanges of emails. There was an affinity being created and often we moved on to other media, either text messages or on Facebook, something which would allow for a quieter exchange. So there were few people, I was going there from time to time, and I was focusing on a few conversations which I liked. But on Grindr it's become every day, I go left and right, I get less involved in conversations and they also get less interesting. That's the way I see it at least. It's always the same questions which come back 'Hello, how do you do? What are you looking for? Where are you living', sometimes 'what do you do?' (M., 24 years old)

Grindr opening message sequences thus appear oriented towards a concern with not engaging in a 'conversation'. Not only do they appear made of a set of stereotyped questions, but those questions check discrete and objectifiable features characterizing the recipient (location, preference). They carefully avoid engaging with current events,

personal narratives and histories, anything that would involve even minimal relational developments and further talk. Even the routine opening 'what do you do' stands apart in that respect, for it opens the way to personal issues.

In summary, Grindr users have evolved a particular 'linguistic ideology' (Silverstein, 1979) which provides them with an ideal type of what an ordinary 'friendly' conversation is about (relational development), of what kind of conversational practices support such an orientation (mentioning personal events as topics) and which they reject as unsuitable to their own interactional purposes. In order to ensure that Grindr encounters remain brief, short-lived and one-off without leading to a relationship, thereby leaving their participants unaffected by them, distinctive practices are required for conversational openings, which will somehow allow the encounter to unfold while working to stifle the relational potentialities that are inherent to the conversational medium. The Grindr user above thus remarks that however stereotyped Grindr opening sequences may be, they could still always develop into a 'conversation'. Whatever Grindr users might do then will always happen in the medium of ordinary conversation. Special interactional work must constantly be done to avoid it evolving into references to personal matters and moving into relational territory. Achieving an 'unfriendly' Grindr encounter, one with no future and which leaves its participants unchanged, is no mean accomplishment. As we will try to show now, this leads to a distinctive orientation in opening sequences: these are collaboratively done as a kind of mutual 'checklist', where the matching of criteria replaces the evocation and discussion of personal events.

Checklist versus conversation: the stereotyped character of Grindr instant messaging exchanges

The Grindr typical scenario, which enacts male gay desire as an overwhelming inner impulse dissociated from social attachments, frames the object of desire as a commodity among many similar ones. It weaves together physical appearance and proximity into availability and arousal, and eventually projects its shadow over the initial stage of the encounter, that is, the initiation of an instant messaging exchange. All of the interviewees noted the stereotypical character of these exchanges:

> With Grindr, it's simple, and there is anonymity, and it's fast. And chats are like 'You're looking for what, you're active/passive, you host, when are you free, and that's it'. (P., 44 years old)

This leads to some extreme forms of standardization of the messages:

> It's really always the same thing, in mass. I have pre-recorded sentences that I send all the time rather than spending my time writing the same thing. (S., 31 years old)

Initial exchanges are also multimodal, and such a multimodality is supported by the design of the chat interfaces. The latter offers a menu with three affordances: one for sending pictures, one for sending locations (which will appear in the chat as clickable icons occupying one line) and one for clearing the chat (Figure 2(b)). Since sending pictures and one's location are part of standard openings, those become specifically

multimodal, in the sense of interweaving text messages, pictures and the map icon, as in Exchange 1. This is reinforced by their design, as messages, pictures and map icons are framed within a design which mimics that of talk as represented in cartoons and graphic novels (see Exchange 1 and Figure 3).

Exchange 1 (Clocktime is P.M.)
1.   07:34 A. Coucou
              Hey
2.   07:43 B. Hello pic

3.   07:44 A.
4.   07:48 B. T   ù
              You're where
5.   07:49 B. Eu comment lol ?
              Er how lol ?

6.   07:51 A.
7.   07:51 B. A   ss
              Address
8.   07:51 A. Tu ch?
              ((*'You're looking for what ?' in abridged form*)
9.   07:52 B. plan
              ((*'quick sexual encounter'*))
10. 07:52 B. gentilly

Exchange 1 displays written exchanges which are so stereotyped as to be formulaic and abridged, as evidenced in particular in the question–answer pair in Messages 8–9. In particular, the briefness of the answer about what the other is looking for '*plan*' (Message 9) reinforces the orientation of the standard script towards a raw physical urge, neglecting any need for conversation nicety or polite management of impressions. Exchange 1 also displays an instant messaging conversation in which written messages are interspersed with graphic messages, pictures or the icon map.

Initial instant messaging exchanges are produced with an orientation towards checklists, in three respects. First, most questions and answers are oriented towards making explicit and available discrete items of information, such as pictures (the eligibility of a potential partner being mostly determined on that basis at this stage), location (projecting a time frame for a possible encounter), and immediate goals ('tu cherches ?', i.e. 'are you looking for a quickie (or not)?', sexual preferences, etc.). Even questions which might lead to complex descriptions are framed so as to orient answers towards contrastive pairs of short descriptors. Sexual preferences, which could be extensively discussed and elaborated upon, are thus treated only along dichotomies such as active/passive. Second, and most characteristically, these opening messages may be produced in 'bursts' or a 'volley' of requests for information, as in Figure 3, that is one after the other. The writer, by displaying he is not waiting for an answer after each question, thus displays his orientation towards filling (and obtaining) pre-determined checkable items rather than engaging into

Figure 3. The 'checklist orientation': an instance of initiating contact with a burst of stereotypical questions.

a fully fledged dialogic conversation. Third, such information may be volunteered in the opening stage, as the picture in Figure 2, showing that the provision of such information is relevant all the time at this stage (if not asked for yet, it will be soon).

The requests or offerings which work towards putting into interactional play the various criteria relevant to the conventional checklist at this stage are also produced with a strong orientation towards reciprocity. Pictures and localizations are expected to be shared on a routine and immediate basis. The provision of pictures or maps is taken into a web of strong expectations regarding reciprocation. This orientation towards the reciprocal provision of similar information can also be seen in Exchange 2.

> *Exchange 2*
> 1. 08:02PM A Kif
>   *Like*
> 2. 08:02PM B toi ?
>   *you?*
> 3. 08:03PM A T'aime koi ?
>   *What you like?*

4. 08:03PM A T ou
Where're you?

5. 08:03PM A

6. 08:04PM B j'aime sucer et etre sucer bouffage de cu couille et sodo
I like to suck and be sucked, ass-, ball-eating and sodo

7. 08:04PM B

A's request for localization (Message 3) is immediately followed by A's provision of his own localization through the map in Message 5, before B can reply. It shows that the provision of his own localization is presupposed by his request. So the different criteria that are crucial to the initiation of an encounter are often produced in and as symmetrical sequences, the meaning of which might be displayed in the next turn. Participants thus appear to be collaborating to a kind of tentative 'profile matching'-in-interaction.

This provides for a characteristic sequential organization in which criteria for both participants are produced as adjacent pairs (picture–picture, localization map–localization map, sexual orientation–sexual orientation) which are then intelligible as 'matches' (projecting continuation of the matching activity) or 'mismatches' an example of which we will discuss below, which may render such a continuation problematic. The profiles involved in the Grindr application provide a kind of template for such an interactional activity and enable it. It is another sense in which the socio-materiality of the application contributes to the shaping of the kind of interactions that emerge from actual use.

If we consider ordinary conversation as dialogic and open-ended, and as the site of a constant elaboration of talk, topics, identities and relations, the checklist therefore seems to occupy an opposite end of the dialogic spectrum. The moment-by-moment elaboration which characterizes conversation seems here restricted to a minimal checking out of discrete items of information. In the checklist format, topics, goals, relationships and identities are oriented-to as pre-determined, and (almost) immune to the kind of constant re-elaboration which is the mark of ordinary conversation. The shaping of the initial instant messaging contact as a collaborative checklist and tentative matching of discrete, pre-determined items which are not open to change in the course of the exchange is adapted to, and reinforces, the standard script for the encounter. The latter is thus posited as external both to social concerns (doing away with politeness and face management) and to developmental concerns (participants are there to satisfy an immediate sexual drive, and are not supposed to change or grow personally through such an encounter). The encounter may occur not as the development of a conversation but on the basis of a set of criteria for availability, which have to be checked one by one for a meeting to occur.

Walking the thin line between profile-matching and ordinary conversation as an interactional resource

This is not to say that something unanticipated may not happen. Users are aware that however much they work at keeping the interaction to the stereotyped list checking and

profile matching, something (in the sense of a social, as opposed to a purely sexual relationship) may be enacted all the time, because they interact in, as and through (electronic) conversation:

> It's always the same questions which come back 'Hello, how do you do? What are you looking for? Where are you living', sometimes 'what do you do?' After all these questions come back all the time, *even though it could be the start of an interesting and durable conversation*, eventually since it is always the same questions asked automatically there is less 'piquant'. (M., 24 years old)

Because conversation is what it is, because it involves the minute and moment-by-moment collaboration of participants to produce intelligible interaction in a way that is 'inference-rich' (Sacks, 1992), that is in a way that any noticeable action in the stream of conversation will lead to interpretation, and often personal interpretation, there is always the chance that any message might occasion a switch from profile-matching to personal talk.

The following extract provides an instance of such a move. It also shows nicely how participants are reflexively aware of the genre of interaction they are producing, whether a profile-based opening, oriented towards a sexual encounter or an 'ordinary' and personal chat conversation, and how they are able to use such an awareness as an interactional resource in itself:

Exchange 3
1.   12:16 A. Enchanté. Que cherches tu
         Glad to meet you. What are you looking for?
2.   12:16 B. Enchanté
         Glad to meet you
3.   12:16 B. Pour le moment beaucoup de sex et toi
         For now a lot of sex and you
4.   12:16 A. De même. Que cherches tu
         Same. What are you looking for?
5.   12:16 A. Pas de plan q
         No quickie
6.   12:17 B. un mec comme toi
         a guy like you
7.   12:17 B. Lol
8.   12:17 B. Je suis en manque lol
         I am horny lol
9.   12:17 A. Qu'est-ce que j'ai de particulier
         What is special about me
10.   12:17 A. Moi les plans q me gavent
          Me quickies bore me
11.   12:18 B. Le charme déjà après il faut voir
          Charm first. After one has to see
12.   12:18 A. Oui t'as raison. Mais moi je cherche plus du sérieux
          Yes you're right. But me I'm looking for something more serious.
13.   12:18 B. Idem pour les plans q mais je ne dis pas non
          Ditto for quickies but I don't say no

14. 12:19 B. Moi je suis preneur je vie entre Paris et la Corse
        Me I'm a taker. I live between Paris and Corsica.
15. 12:19 A. Tu es corse ?
        You're Corsican?

Since the pace of this exchange is rather fast, messages are sent in bursts and adjacent pairs tend to overlap. The conversation is oriented towards rapidly (i.e. at the first sequential opportunity, immediately after the initial exchange of greetings, Message 1) checking the mutual orientations of the participants regarding an encounter. In Message 3, B's formulation of what he is looking for falls squarely in the sexual encounter scenario. When offered to reciprocate, however, A explicitly rejects that scenario (Message 5). Both participants thus produce what we may call a 'mismatch' pair, a kind of sequence which is common in these openings oriented towards profile matching in action. Here, a first message is produced which asserts a preference, and the next message reciprocates with a contradictory preference, producing a mismatch, and calling for some form of resolution, as in challenging sequences, where a claim/counter-claim pair projects a third turn, the nature of which will bear on the possible trajectory of the dispute (Antaki, 1994). Such mismatches may emerge as such only retrospectively, through a third position turn, as when an exchange of location (the production of similar criteria in an adjacent pair format) is followed by an assessment that they are too far to meet.

Because of delays, messages in the sequence often come in twos, and there are two interwoven threads of messages and response, and so the 'mismatch' is not treated immediately. In the second thread, A repeats his question ('What are you looking for?'), and B replies, 'A guy like you' (Message 6) and adds 'I'm horny' (Message 8). Again, B's replies are consistent with the sexual encounter scenario. A seems to recognize this, for he goes on with a wh-question 'what is special about me?' Such a question may operate across the repertoire of genres. On the one hand, it might call for a profile-oriented reply, and on the other, being a wh-question, it also makes possible some elaborations which could depart from the sexual script scenario. However, in that particular sequential position, it is hearable as in a sense 'resisting' the sexual encounter frame. B seems aware of this for his reply 'charm' is also ambivalent. While it could mean physical appearance (which is part of the sexual encounter scenario), it also opens the way to a more personal dimension of attraction. In Message 12, A seems to be pushing for clarification while distancing himself once more from the sexual scenario ('I am looking for something more serious'), thus re-animating their earlier mismatch (Messages 3–5) regarding what they are looking for. In that respect, B's next reply (Message 13) is pivotal. It first affiliates with A's rejection of the sexual encounter ('same with the plan cul'), thus effectively cancelling the mismatch and aligning with A's project, though almost all he had said before was going the other way. And he follows up with a weaker claim (the initial 'but' which subordinates it to what he has just said) reasserting his original orientation ('but I don't say no'). The structure of his reply ('yes but') seems to index his resigning himself to the fact that their social contact will not go the way of the sexual encounter, while not just getting out of the interaction or even ceasing outright to reply (which is usually the option taken by Grindr users looking for sexual hook-ups). Indeed, in his next message, without being prompted, he volunteers what amounts to a piece of personal information

('I live between Paris and Corsica'), which displays his reorientation towards enacting now what amounts to an electronic conversation (as indexed by the personal nature of the information). A quickly seems to recognize this 'personalization' of their interaction (which he has been calling for from the start) by the way his next question, 'you're Corsican?' (Message 15), affiliates with such a reframing of the ongoing interaction, inviting some elaboration of personal facts. The participants mutually achieve a reshaping of the interaction into a 'conversation' and display to one another that they recognize their joint achievement as such. And of course, while their conversation will develop further, the question of meeting will fade away.

Conclusion

The Grindr mobile app is used as a resource to produce a distinctive type of social encounter, quick sexual encounters between strangers (which need to be had within the half hour) based on location awareness. These are now 'privatized', being managed from and occurring within the home (Author). They are designed and perceived as 'purely sexual'. Not only are they oriented towards quasi-immediate sexual gratification, but they are designed to preclude repeat encounters and relational development, so that the protagonists are supposedly left unaffected, emotionally, relationally and socially, by such encounters. This creates a rather special, and analytically interesting, interactional dilemma, as Grindr users, unlike people looking for sexual encounters in public places who can rely mostly on gaze and gesture, must use the medium of electronic conversation to initiate contact.

However, electronic chats are mostly used as a medium for 'friendly' conversation ordinarily developing through references to personal events and interests. As such, they are unfit for Grindr users looking for casual sexual hook-ups, who forcefully deny being 'friends' and rather self-categorize as 'hunters and preys', and want to avoid any relational build-up. We have shown that this makes them reflexively aware of what 'conversation' is generally about, and of its relational implications. They are able to pinpoint the specific conversational practices which support such an orientation (i.e. mentioning personal events as topics) and which they reject as unsuitable to their own interactional purposes. Therefore, they must evolve distinctive practices for initiating a Grindr encounter, which will somehow be compatible enough with the medium of electronic conversation to allow the social contact to proceed, while somehow working to stifle the relational potentialities which are inherent to such a conversational medium. Achieving an 'unfriendly' Grindr encounter within a usually 'friendly' interactional medium is an accomplishment in itself.

We have shown some of the sequential resources they use and which make Grindr opening sequences appear both stereotyped (from the standpoint of 'ordinary conversation') and recognizable to participants as such. We have identified empirically some of their distinctive sequential features from a conversation analytic perspective: multimodality (texts, maps and pictures are all interactional moves on the same graphic and pragmatic footing), a checklist orientation (looking for the provision of a few usual criteria, the matching of which are crucial to the organization of the encounter, such as pictures, sexual preferences and localization) and reciprocity (the provision of a given

criterion by A entails an expectation of the provision of the matching criterion by B as a relevant next action). Such contacts therefore proceed as 'matching sequences' which use another important feature built into the design of the mobile application, that is, profiles, as a crucial conversational resource. Profile-matching talk helps them to avoid referring to personal issues and entangling their biographies as in an ordinary conversation. Matching sequences also shape potential trajectories for the social contact, moving into a sexual encounter within a short time in the case of a match on all counts, dropping out of the interaction in the case of a mismatch (sometimes without warning, by just ceasing to reply) or, more rarely, as in the last example we analyzed, redefining both the frame of the ongoing exchange and the way to talk. This particular example shows vividly how participants are able to recognize ordinary conversation and Grindr 'stereotyped' and impersonal matching sequences as distinctive interactional genres, and to use this as a local sequential resource. Starting within the Grindr format, the two participants we observed constructed a mismatch through their profile-matching sequence, and responded to it by making the interaction 'personal' and moving into a 'conversation'. The collaborative accomplishment of such a reframing provides an example of how the open-endedness and sequential organization of human interaction continuously provide for the possibility of such shifts.

The development of such specialized interactional practices and interactional ideologies regarding the opening sequences critically rest on the socio-materiality of the application itself. In a sense, the very design of the mobile application provides for the co-constitution of an interactional 'problem' and for resources to circumvent it. On the one hand, the initial contact has to be performed within the medium of a mobile chat, the common use of which is for having electronic and 'friendly' conversations, which are potentially unsuitable for the initiation of 'pure' sexual encounters. On the other hand, because Grindr is a mobile dating application overlaying a location-aware mobile social networking infrastructure, it is profile-based, with several criteria playing a decisive role in the production of a Grindr encounter. Profiling criteria, chat design (for instance, the choice to make the exchange of localized maps and pictures self-contained one-click interactional moves within the chat) and the sequential organization of talk (particularly the adjacent pair organization) can be combined in the emergent accomplishment of Grindr openings as criterion-matching sequences, which gives them their stereotyped appearance and their recognizable character as a speech event that is distinct from 'conversation'. In that sense, the location-aware Grindr application may also be seen as an interactional affordance.

We are currently witnessing the development of similar location-aware mobile apps for heterosexual dating (Tinder, Lovoo, etc.). With such apps, one might still observe, at least among some heterosexual mobile users, an increased orientation towards immediacy and proximity, mediated by locational affordances. However, since sex between anonymous strangers in public places is not a recognized and shared practice within heterosexual circles to the same extent it is in male gay communities, one might observe a wider distribution of relational orientations in the use of such mobile apps than a focus on casual hook-ups, and less of a concern with keeping messaging conversations as impersonal as possible for that purpose, though all this remains a matter for further empirical study.

Funding

References

Antaki C. (1994) *Explaining and Arguing.The Social Organization of Accounts*. London: Sage.

Bayart JF (2014) *Le plan cul. Ethnographie d'une pratique sexuelle*. Paris: Fayard.

Blackwell C, Birnholtz J and Abbott C (2014) Seeing and being seen: co-situation and impression formation using Grindr, a location aware gay dating app. *New Media & Society*. Epub ahead of print 7 February. DOI: 10.1177/1461444814521595.

Brubaker J, Anani M and Crawford K (2014) Departing glances: a sociotechnical account of 'leaving' Grindr. *New Media & Society*. Epub ahead of print 7 July. DOI: 10.1177/1461444814542311.

Callon M (1998) *The Laws of the Markets*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Chauncey G (1996) Privacy could only be had in public: gay uses of the street. In: Sanders J (ed.) *Stud: Architectures of Masculinity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, pp. 224–267.

Crabtree A and Rodden T (2008) Hybrid ecologies: understanding cooperative interaction in emerging physical-digital environments. *Personal and Ubiquitous Computing* (12): 481–493.

De Souza e Silva A and Frith J (2010) Locative mobile social networks: mapping communication and location in urban spaces. *Mobilities* 5(4): 485–505.

De Souza e Silva A and Sutko J (2009) *Digital Cityscapes: Merging Digital and Urban Playspaces*. New York: Peter Lang.

Enfield N and Levinson C (2006) *Roots of Human Sociality: Culture, Cognition and Interaction*. Oxford: Berg.

Farman J (2012) *Mobile Interfaces: Embodied Space and Locative Media*. London: Routledge.

Frith J (2012) *Constructing location, one check-in at a time: Examining the practices of four-square users*. Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of North Texas, Available at: http://repository.lib.ncsu.edu/ir/bitstream/1840.16/8064/1/etd.pdf

Frith J (2013) Turning life into a game. Foursquare, gamification and personal mobility. *Mobile Media & Communication* 1(2): 248–262.

Gagnon J and Simon W (1973) *Sexual Conduct*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.

Humphreys L (1975) *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Humphreys L (2007) Mobile social networks and social practice: a case study of Dodgeball. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13(1): 341–360.

Humphreys L (2010) Mobile social networks and urban public spaces. *New Media & Society* 12(5): 763–778.

Licoppe C and Inada Y (2010) Locative media and cultures of mediated proximity: the case of the Mogi game location-aware community. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28(4): 691 – 709.

Licoppe C and Legout MC (2014) Living inside mobile social information: the pragmatics of four-square notifications. In: Katz J (ed.) *Living inside Mobile Information*. Dayton, OH: Greyden Press, pp. 109–130.

Licoppe C, Rivière CA and Morel J (in press) Proximity awareness and the privatization of sexual encounters with strangers. The case of Grindr. In: Zelizer B and Marvin C (eds) *Context Collapse: Re-Thinking Spatial Boundaries*. London: Routledge.

Light B, Fletcher G and Adam A (2008) Gay men, Gaydar and the commodification of difference. *Information Technology & People* 21(3): 300–314.

Milgram S (1974) The frozen world of the familiar stranger. *Psychology Today* 17: 70–80.

Mowlabocus S (2010) *Gaydar Culture*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing.

Race K (2015) Speculative pragmatism and intimate arrangements: online hook-up devices in gay life.*Culture, Health & Sexuality: An International Journal for Research, Intervention and Care* 17(4): 496-511.

Sacks H (1992) *Lectures on conversation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Silverstein M (1979) Language structure and linguistic ideology. In: Clyne P, Hanks W and Hofbauer C (eds) *The Elements: A Parasession on Linguistic Units and Levels*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Linguistic Society, pp. 193–247.

Woo J (2013) *Meet Grindr*. James Woo.

Author biographies

Christian Licoppe is a professor of sociology at the department of Social Science in Telecom ParisTech in Paris. He has used mobile geolocation and communication data to analyze mobility and sociability patterns of mobile phone users. He has studied various phenomena related to the proliferation of mediated communication events and 'connected presence'. He has also studied extensively the uses of location-aware games and proximity-aware mobile technologies communities. His recent work in mobile communication has focused on the development of methods to record and analyze the use of mobile communication in 'natural' situations (such as mobility and transport settings) and on the use of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis to understand the organization of mobile communication as in Skype and mobile video calls.

Carole Anne Rivière (PhD sociology and master degree in psychology) has worked as a researcher in Orange Labs, focusing on digital sociability from a social network analysis perspective, in France and in Asia. She has developed a concern with design thinking and digital innovation services and managed a research program in the field of ageing for a non-benefit organization (Fing). She is actually working on a mission for the management of organizational change centred on the user-centred innovation in Orange and as a freelance psychotherapist.

Julien Morel is associate professor SES, Telecom ParisTech, France. He studies the natural organization of face-to-face and mediated interactions (mobile conversations, video communication, location-aware communities and augmented reality games). He also creates new video methodologies to study the uses of ICT in situation of mobility.