Looking for Right Now: A Rhetorical Analysis on Gay Men's Diction Relative to Grindr

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Abstract

Since the turn of the century, humanity has seen the rise of multiple technology booms over the last 15 years. Although, as instant access to information has grown, so has another type of networking: Social networking. As individuals become acclimated to rapid-fire style updates bombarding them online, users want to be able to instantly give feedback, or simply provide their own instantaneous social updates for friends and family. Because of this, people have begun taking their social selves online and developing a cyber-persona, paving the way for online dating and app-based dating. Contemporary "apps" used on a smartphone have gained immense popularity in the heterosexual community with apps such as Tinder and Hinge in addition to apps in the LGBTQ+ community such as Dattch (for gay/bisexual/gender-queer women) and Grindr (for gay/bisexual/gender-queer men). However, little research has been done to analyze the effectiveness of these apps (especially in regards to the LGBTQ+ community), and how well the rhetoric used by members parallels the company's slogan. In this paper, a rhetorical analysis on Grindr users was performed in order to determine the app's effectiveness both as a "dating software" in addition to establishing a relationship with the company motto of "0 feet away." In an effort to obtain accurate data, a proxy account was set up in order to view content displayed on each user's profile. Interestingly, based on the rhetorical analyses conducted, gay, male users' diction paralleled Grindr's mission statement of bringing men "0 feet away from each other."

Keywords: LGBTQ; Grindr; Georgia

1. Introduction

In the last two decades, technology has grown exponentially. From the growth of home desktops to laptops to the first iPhone and finally to the expansive collection of smartphones with app based software, users have access to countless amounts of information at the palm of their hands. This information is not limited to knowledge found in a modern encyclopedia, but rather, information happening "in the now," but as instant access to information has grown, so has another type of networking: Social networking. As individuals become acclimated to rapid-fire style updates bombarding them online, users want to be able to instantly give feedback, or simply provide their own instantaneous social updates for friends and family. Because of this, people have begun taking their social selves online and developing a cyber-persona, paving the way for online dating. Commonplace terms such as "eHarmony" "Match.com" and "Zoosk.com" developed from this migratory transition. Contrary to popular belief, most of these dating sites are not "new" (less than 6 years old), "Match" being created in 1995 [1], "eHarmony" in 2000 [2], and "Zoosk" in 2007 [3]. However, from conception, they have given rise to the current mode of cyber dating: App-based dating. Contemporary "apps" used on a smartphone have gained immense popularity in the heterosexual community with apps such as Tinder and Hinge as well as in the LGBTQ community with apps such as Dattch (for gay/bisexual/gender-queer women) and Grindr (for gay/bisexual/gender-queer men). By rhetorically analyzing Grindr based on its motto, users' profiles, and

messages communicated between users, better insight into gay/queer culture can be understood on how these men communicate in an app-based environment.

Grindr was created in 2009 under the mission statement of bringing men "0 feet away from each other." Grindr's website claims "0 feet away" is a "state of mind, a way of life- a new kind of dating experience."[4] Totally, the creators want users to veer away from online dating sites that require the use of surveys or formulaic equations to find a mate. Instead, men should use the app to locate other men nearby, and bring the conversation face-to-face, literally, 0 feet away. The name "Grindr" is a combination of the words "guy" and "finder," but also, according to their website, is also used as a verb meaning to "grind people together by introducing them to like-minded users across the globe" similar to the way a coffee grinder grinds coffee beans. With this mindset, Grindr has grown to hosting over 5 million users across 192 countries with ~10,000 more downloads daily.[5] Even though it is not expressly written on their website, Grindr has become known in the LGBTQ+ community as solely a "hook-up" app that gay men use to meet other gay men nearby for coitus. Because of the societal concept of men's sex drive, many take this claim at face value and perpetuate the connotations derived from the app's use.

2. Methodology

To test these pre-conceived notions about the app's use, a download of the app was necessary in order to analyze the rhetoric firsthand. The Grindr application was downloaded from the Apple App Store and was used on an Apple iPhone (iOS) device. Once downloaded, a user profile was established. The profile contained no personal information, bio, or picture, but was merely used as a way to view the other profiles on the interface. It should be noted that Grindr does utilize a geo-tracking system, which lists 10-30 males on the homepage in order of closest proximity to farthest proximity with a ~15 mile cap from the user. The application does contain a "location off" feature that was used to disable other users from viewing the researcher's physical proximity, though the user could still view others' distances. If a user finds someone he is "interested in," he can select the chat option to start a conversation via the app interface; a user can also list another person as a "favorite" which enables them to chat or view his profile even when the user is far away.

When viewing a user's profile, it gives brief, concise details about the person if they choose to give it. These details include associated Tribe (bear, clean-cut, jock, twink, etc.), height, weight, body type, ethnicity, what that person is looking for (i.e. friendship, dating, a relationship, and networking), and a section for "write-in" information, but is limited to 255 characters. With Grindr limiting users "mini biographies" to 255 characters, they are reinforcing their stance of "0 feet away" by reversing the cyber-based dating to an in-person dating model.

In order to analyze how effective Grindr is at promoting its motto and message, a rhetorical analysis of the postings crafted by users of the app is necessary; even though it is a cyber-based app, in order to maintain anonymity, each user is specified as "Grindr Guy 1, Grindr Guy 2, etc." For the purpose of this analysis, a single download of the app was used in the same location of north Georgia, so all of the profiles remained (relatively) the same. The only time the user's information would change is if they decided to update their profile. Due to this consistency, users were not bound by time, but instead might have been limited due to the location being in a Southern state within the "Bible Belt" as opposed to elsewhere in the country. Totally, 17 Grindr profiles were analyzed, but 14 were discarded (with further explanation below) due to lack of a profile picture, biography, or description. The three remaining profiles underwent rhetorical analysis, focusing on diction and persuasion underlying each users' personal branding (i.e. Preferences, Profile Picture, and Bio). Due to the spontaneous downloads and deletions of the app, analyses were conducted over the course of a 48-hour period to control for any deletions of profiles.

3. Profile Analysis

Looking first at "Grindr Guy 1's" profile: He specifies his age at 36 and his "profile picture" is a full image of him with his shirt lifted halfway. His preferences are listed as: White, Toned, Partnered, and Looking For: Right Now. His bio states the following: "Looking for friend's possible 3rd. He's total top, I am versatile both ways. We like White or mixed or Latino, our preference. HAVE A FACE PIC OR SEND ONE. PLEASE. I'm 5"11 and 170 tone build. Let's play! ;)" The rhetoric behind his posting reveals a great deal about the user; he specifically states what he is looking for (i.e. White, mixed, or Latino), but also describes what he is "into" as he states he is versatile (meaning he prefers to both give and receive anal sex) and his partner is a "top" (meaning he prefers to only "give" anal sex). While this user in particular is looking for a threesome more so than a relationship, he is effective at eliciting the "0 feet away"

motive of Grindr by using verbiage such as "Right Now" and "Let's play." These statements also have the connotations of a sexual encounter which can also be said of Grindr's double entendre meaning of "0 feet away" slogan.

Next, we examine "Grindr Guy 2's" profile. His profile is only of his chest, no face picture at all. When analyzing his description and bio, he identifies himself as 5'10'' 148 lbs, White, Slim, Single, Looking For: Chat, Dates, Friends, and labels himself as Discreet (meaning he is "closeted" about his sexuality). His bio states the following, "18 years old. Looking for dates, maybe hookups. I'm into young white guys. Message me, we'll see what happens from there ;)" Again, we see this common thread among Grindr users who simply want to "hook-up," but this does effectively demonstrate Grindr's "0 feet away" motto. In this case, the meaning translates to being not only close geographically, but also having sex with the other person. However, this individual uses rhetoric such as "Discreet" and "maybe hookups" when describing himself. This somewhat contradicts the user's initial intent of meeting up right away, but instead demonstrates his hesitance of being completely open and promiscuous with his sexuality.

It is important to note the next 14 profiles found on the app lacked at least one of the following: A) a profile picture, B) a description/bio section, or C) any information at all. With these profiles, users are still able to message other individuals, but have refrained from listing anything personal about themselves on the app either visually or through text. This, along with profiles that just show a person's individual body part (e.g. chest-only), directly contradict Grindr's intended sought after responses. Many gay men using the app specifically use the following terminology: "Have a face pic," or "No face pic, no reply." By undermining the desires of other users, they are directly competing against the foundations of Grindr's "0 feet away" precedence. In this way, these men are not encouraging the first step of the process: The initial communication. Without the first message, a face-to-face meeting will not occur.

"Grindr Guy 3's Profile" opens with a banner message of the following "Discreet bi. 420 is welcomed. Down for anything." He then gives the following facts about himself: 19 years, 5'10", 244 lbs, Looking For: Chat, Dates, Friends. His profile picture is of him and another guy, but does not appear sexual in any way with him wearing all clothes and sunglasses. Here, however, Grindr is being utilized as much more than a dating site; the user states "420 is welcomed" which translates to "pot or other drugs are welcomed." While the user is effective at putting up an open front, the original intent of the app is not being followed; while a relationship, friendship, or a sexual encounter might evolve from this post, an alternative motive of finding drugs juxtapose Grindr's original message. In response to profiles such as this, other users will sometimes post descriptions in their profile such as "Clean" to indicate they are both drug and disease free.

4. Implications

When looking at all of the profiles listed as a whole, I expected to see age as a limiting factor between different men. My initial thoughts were men over the age of 30 would post less provocative pictures, be more open in their bio's or profile pictures, or post wants and desires soliciting a long-term relationship or something more than sex. For the younger men below the age of 30, I expected the opposite; higher provocativity, shirtless pictures, sexual innuendos, and more men looking for sex instead of a partnership. What I found instead was no strong, single factor permeated through an age group. Profiles seemed fairly balanced between men who wanted sex compared to a long-term relationship and profiles that contained a face profile picture compared to those who did not. This led to the assumption that the type of rhetoric presented was actually unaffected by age.

While still looking at all of the profiles in sum, an interesting motif permeating throughout many users is an aura of disconnect secrecy, meaning, a disconnect between their cyber "selves" and their real-life "selves." Most of the pictures listed tend to have an ambiguous presence in them: The obvious being the people who fail to show their faces at all or merely their torso; however, the individuals who are wearing sunglasses covering their eyes, or the users who put up a picture of the landscape also demonstrate this effect. This disconnected rhetoric between what the users want and who they actually are combats Grindr's overall intent: To break away from the cyber space, and put people with a common trait together. By shielding their humanity, users see other users as mere sexual objects as opposed to people who are vying for another's true love.

With all of the above being said, it is key to understand that Grindr's uniqueness stems from that fact that people using the app are not "of the norm." They are isolated individuals who are merely trying to connect with one another, but sometimes play out assigned roles imposed by society as sex addicts looking to "hook up" all of the time. Stephen Hartman describes this type of social behavior as a necessity to non-heterosexual individuals, "one where the lawless self recognizes itself as an Other among others."[6]

Therefore, if an individual reading this paper is a user of the app, or the parent of an LGBTQ+ child, or even the friend of someone using the app, understand that it is perfectly acceptable for individuals to want to relate to other people "like" them that they might not get to meet in an everyday setting for fear of the social consequences.

5. Conclusion

In sum, for every male downloading Grindr to try to find a chance at true love, or to meet friends and bridge the distance between them, five other men are downloading Grindr to exploit others for drugs, sex, or harm. Because of this, it is vital to make sure users understand what type of response other individuals are trying to display from their own rhetoric and what type of response they are hoping to generate. Individuals then have to ultimately ask themselves a question which Grindr is implicitly asking as well, "Do *you* want to be 0 feet away from this person?"

6. Acknowledgements

My sincere thanks and appreciation goes out to Dr. Rifenburg for first assigning this project in a sophomore level composition class, but for also preaching the necessity of rhetorical research and how rhetorical analyses can lend themselves to unique contexts. I would also like to give my never-ending gratitude to Dr. Anastasia Lin, without whom I would still be clueless as to the thought of undergraduate research. Warmest thanks to all who took the time to read drafts of this paper and to those who are still reading my future projects. I will forever be indebted to you.

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