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Queering digital temporalities? Visceral geographies of Grindr

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A B S T R A C T

Neoliberal discourses present digital technologies as life-enhancing, promising a collapse of space and time as time becomes neatly organised in ways where lives become increasingly convenient and 'productive'. Grindr offers such an experience, promising users instant and numerous sexual encounters in the places they live, doing so, however, against sets of heteronormative ideas of time, sex and sexuality. In this article, I explore the ways that men who use Grindr in Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 2015 experience using the app amongst competing sets of meanings of sexuality and temporality. By focusing on the lived experience of using Grindr, I expose a range of spatiotemporal disjunctures and I argue there is a paradox of using Grindr – that users are often forced to feel shameful about an app that offers the collapse of space/time and erotic futures, whilst feeling as though using Grindr is wasted time when such a collapse, and future, is not available. I do so by taking a visceral approach, enabling investigation into the way bodily intensities come into being through arrangements of digital discourses, encounters and spaces. I conclude by highlighting how queer and feminist approaches to digital spatiotemporalities enables a revelation of the ways the promise of digital futures is not often materialised, especially for people who may challenge normative ideas of space and time. Therefore, I offer geographers a way of conceptualising digital technologies as both queer and neoliberal, where both positions may always be failing.

1. Introduction

Since its release in 2009, Grindr (a digital dating app aimed at gay, bi and queer men) has found itself at the centre of multiple conversations in public discourse, in the media and among health officials. Grindr has become known as a 'sex app' that has enabled gay, bi and queer men to have a high number of sexual encounters over short periods, associated with the spreading of sexually transmitted infections (Enomoto, Noor, & Widner, 2017; Winetrobe, Rice, Bauermeister, Petering, & Holloway, 2014); the increased risk to gay men's safety, livelihood and wellbeing (Jaspal, 2017; Rice et al., 2012); and the meaningless sexual encounters (Raj, 2013). The app itself promises, often, to enable certain type of sexual and romantic futures by geo-locating users with each other. These discourses do not just exist as such, but they shape how the people that use Grindr make sense of their experiences, which was the case for 30 men who used Grindr that I interviewed in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK, in 2015. These men often spoke about the shame experienced when using Grindr, in that it is often understood as an app only used for promiscuous sexual practices. At the same time, however, they often contradicted this notion suggesting that they often spend – or waste – a lot of time trying to find and maintain future sexual encounters.

In this article, I explore the ways that men who use Grindr in Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 2015 experience using the app amongst competing sets of meanings. I first focus on the ways that Grindr users experience shame across different places as they fear they may be recognised as part-taking in instant, risky and casual sexual encounters. I

then explore how users felt they would waste time using Grindr as sexual (and romantic) encounters are not so 'instant'. By focusing on the lived experience of temporality and sexuality, I argue there is a paradox of using Grindr – that users are often forced to feel shameful about an app due to the associated meanings, whilst feeling as though using Grindr is wasted time as the promise of instant casual sexual encounters is not so readily available. I, therefore, draw attention to multiple temporalities – ones about the speed of sexual encounters and those about the promise of certain sexual futures. I do so by taking a visceral approach, to examine how bodies feel and experience both shame and time as they make sense of digital technologies.

In their review of the digital geographies, Ash et al (2018, p. 27) argue that discourses are important features of the 'digital', stating that 'discourses which actively promote, enable, secure, and materially sustain the increasing reach of digital technologies'. Digital technologies are often presented as life-enhancing, providing enhanced security and making everyday life more seamless, promising a collapse of space and time in a way that distance may no longer matter and time becomes neatly organised in ways where lives become increasingly 'productive' (Kitchin, 2023; Smith, 2018). Such discourses are shaped by neoliberal visions of the future, where lives continue to benefit from a linear understanding of modernity – the digital promises a neoliberal future. At the same time, there are ongoing discourses that suggest that the digital is 'bad' for our lives in terms of wellbeing, mental health and/or security and surveillance (Aunspach, 2020; Kitchin, 2014; Sutton, 2017). Some scholars are turning to the tools of queer theory to question the utopic

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visions of the digital, in that queer perspectives make space for messy, out of sync and un-coordinated spatialities and temporalities (Halberstam, 2005; Muñoz, 2009; Oswin, 2014) where otherness exists, and challenges, capitalist and heteronormative visions of the digital (Cockayne, Leszczynski, & Zook, 2017; Cockayne & Richardson, 2017, 2019; Jenzen, 2017). From such perspectives, the digital is always emerging in incomplete and uneven ways that create simultaneous inclusions/exclusions and contradictory conditions. Turning attention to Grindr, then, these are the contradictory ways that men make sense of their experiences. Grindr offers a promise of collapsing space and time – through instant sex – but against a dominant discourse of shame as it challenges normative understandings of sexuality and temporality. For the men who use it, their experiences are shaped by this: feeling shame whilst also feeling as though time is wasted when their use of the app is not ‘productive’ of fleshy encounters. Through these felt experiences, I highlight how Grindr can be disruptive but also confirming of heteronormative spatiotemporalities, creating disjunctures between lived experience and the promise of particular sexual futures. By attending to the experiences of using Grindr, I explore how the contradictory discourses are embodied and negotiated in ways that show how queer experiences of digital technologies are situated in a complicated network of discourses on gender, sexuality and the digital.

To do so, I take a visceral approach, enabling investigation into the way bodily intensities, gut reactions and sensations – the visceral – come into being through assemblages of material and discursive elements. I follow feminist and queer corporeal theories that take seriously the materiality of the body (Grosz, 1994; Longhurst, Johnston, & Ho, 2009; Probyn, 2000). Thinking about bodies, and their capacity to affect and be affected, as pre-cognitive leaves little space for the appreciation of power relations, whilst a fully discursive approach does not give agency to the materiality of the body. Therefore, a visceral approach understands gut reactions as instances when bodily sensations, intensities and moods intersect with discourses, ideologies and power structures (Probyn, 2000, 2004). I use this visceral framework to understand how normative spatiotemporalities are negotiated through bodies and places, exposing how digital tech may fail in delivering the futures that it promised. In doing so, I take a feminist and queer geographical approach to the digital that aims to explore how ‘the digital’ is a messy and complicated network that is incomplete and contradictory, yet still embedded in relations of power (Elwood, 2021; McLean, Maalsen, & Prebble, 2019; Rose, 2017). The queer and feminist visceral geographic framework to digital spatiotemporalities that I offer here can therefore provide geographers unique insights when studying the digital.

Grindr is a location-based smartphone dating app that is targeted toward queer men but is not exclusively used by this group of people. It is unlike other popular dating apps, in that users do not require a ‘match’ to start conversations but are presented by a ‘grid’ of users (100 profiles if using the free and 600 profiles if using the paid version) that are ordered by their proximity, with the closer user appearing at the top of the grid. Users have the option to fill out as little or as much of their profile as possible with options for links to social media accounts. There is a conversation function/space where users can share pictures and, since 2020, can send videos and video calls. There is a function that allows users to ‘block’ one another, which means any conversations history will be deleted and the profiles are no longer detectable. Research on Grindr explores the ways profiles are constructed (Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2016), the messy realities of using apps (Brubaker, Ananny, & Crawford, 2014; Licoppe, Rivière, & Morel, 2015) and how intimacy is being reworked (Chan, 2017; Miles, 2017). Much of this research has alerted us to the complicated experiences and identity work that is involved in using apps (Fitzpatrick & Birnholtz, 2017; Hakim, Young, & Cummings, 2022). I contribute to this work by further exploring how discourses manifest in the lives of its users.

The structure of the article is as follows. I first review the literature on queer temporalities followed by the visceral, focusing on the work of Probyn (2000, 2005), with a final review on embodied approaches to the

digital. The methodology follows where I discuss the data collection and analysis. I then move to two discussion sections. The first explores the feelings of shame that emerge from an app that promises ‘quick’ sexual encounters. The second explores how the promise of ‘quick’ sexual encounters is experienced. I then conclude by exploring what queer and feminist perspectives can offer studies of the digital.

2. Queer temporalities

Time and temporality are fundamental to social, political and economic relations, where time itself is constructed through various people, institutions, structures and power relations. The routines of everyday life are often dictated by gendered power relations, family life and commitments (Holdsworth, 2022; Rodriguez Castro, Brady, & Cook, 2022), futures are always being made and anticipated (Anderson, 2010; Horton, 2016) and people can be kept waiting as a form of control (McDowell, Bonner-Thompson, & Harris, 2022; Seitz, 2016). Time, therefore, is always being made and remade through various power relations across multiple spatialities.

How capitalism and modernity are understood relies on particular temporalities (Castree, 2009; Low & Barnett, 2000). Neoliberal capitalism creates a linear understanding of time, where progression supposedly occurs in a straightforward process (Castree, 2009). In this single temporality, we are often promised a future where life will ‘get better’, despite current global socio-spatial conditions. The promise of particular futures – or other times – is often used as a tool of control and power, for example, to keep people waiting for a ‘better’ life (Berlant, 2011; Pettit, 2019). As Berlant (2011) argues, people experiencing intense hardship in the US often believe in a ‘better life’ through affective attachments liberal-democratic notions of a ‘good life’. Exposing the affective attachments to certain (unattainable) futures, Berlant (2011) exposes how neoliberal capitalism continues to function, despite pushing people into poverty.

As well as the promise of particular futures, speed has become a key feature of contemporary life. Speed and immediacy have become central to modernity which shapes work patterns, leisure time and the consumption of art, media and cultural artefacts (Kitchin, 2023; Tomlinson (2007)). These notions of time, speed and progression then become configured into future imaginings, in that places that may not yet have achieved a capitalist understanding of progression should seek to achieve such a future (Raghuram, 2009). These immediate temporalities also shape the design of digital technologies and the discourses that surround them. Digital innovation has often been focused on speed and immediacy, where communication and consumption can be immediate, promising new spatiotemporalities of the ‘now’ (Kitchin, 2023). Normative understandings of time also co-create normative gendered and sexual life trajectories, where people are assumed to progress through certain life stages or events (for example getting married and having children) (Freeman, 2010). These of course are entangled with neoliberal capitalist temporalities, as normative configurations of family are essential to the functioning of capitalist societies.

This does not, however, mean that there are no other temporalities. As queer scholars have highlighted, time and temporality are more complex than normative structures would have us believe. Freeman (2010) argues that queer individuals often experience disruptions and deviations from these normative temporalities, where lives do not follow normative trajectories. For Freeman (2010) sexual pleasure, desire, and embodiment are temporal, making and remaking temporalities, where queer people may imagine alternative futures that contradict current regimes. The idea of ‘queer time’ challenges the idea of a linear understanding of time by embracing the notion of multiple temporalities. It rejects the notion that progress and social change follow a pre-determined path and instead emphasizes the importance of diverse experiences and alternative narratives (Andrucki & Kaplan, 2018; Halberstam, 2005; Luo, Li, & Qi, 2022; Muñoz, 2009; Oswin, 2014). Adeyemi (2019), for example, highlights how slowness is central to the

lives of black queer women in Chicago as they negotiate the speed of neoliberal gentrification to articulate a right to the city. [Andrucki & Kaplan \(2018\)](#) explore how queer temporalities are part of material homemaking practices in transmasculine homes in the US, where trans domestic spaces are formed through queer pasts and presents. These interventions into understandings of time, therefore, offer an alternative to heteronormative and capitalist spatiotemporalities.

Such conceptualisations of temporality may offer important insights into the ways we may understand digital technologies. [Cifor \(2021\)](#) highlights how the speedy affordances of digital platforms – Instagram in particular – can disrupt HIV/AIDS temporalities (as something in the past) by bringing to life the queer people who died during the AIDS epidemic in the United States between 1981 and 1996. For [Cifor \(2021\)](#), using the immediacies of Instagram, an account that memorialises people can bring to the fore the continuing persistence of the HIV/AIDS crisis. [Cockayne and Richardson \(2019, p. 14\)](#) conceptualise the internet through a potential queerness, where the internet is a ‘problematic object out of sync with its own representations of itself’. The internet, and its infrastructures, can never live up to the linear notions of time and space that it promises as embodied experiences do not fit neatly into simplified temporalities meaning there are always glitches ([Berlant, 2016; Cockayne & Richardson, 2019](#)). Therefore the digital becomes queer as it opens up the potential for multiple alternative possibilities. For [Cockayne & Richardson \(2019\)](#), the internet can be both dangerous to marginalised groups whilst also being a site of potential for difference and resistance. In this article, I use queer understandings of temporality to allow for the appreciation of the multiple temporalities that are involved in using Grindr. Specifically, how these are viscerally experienced.

3. The visceral

Inspired by [Deleuze and Guattari’s \(1987\)](#) work on assemblage and affect, the visceral has an appreciation of the moments when discourse and materiality combine and co-mingle ([Probyn, 2000](#)). The visceral is used to refer to the gut feelings, bodily responses, sensations, feelings and emotions that are produced by materials and discourses. For example, sweat (as a material physiological compound) may be produced as a response to heat (physiological), embarrassment or shame (social/discursive), and may take on different meanings dependent on the context – it may produce a feeling of shame and disgust at work but it may be erotic when having sex – which can alert researchers to how people understand self/other ([Waitt, 2014](#)).

[Probyn \(2000, p. 31\)](#) is a key thinker on the visceral and she argues that...

The biological, psychological and the social, are constantly reworked in terms of how at any moment we live our bodies. These modes of living are temporal and spatial, highlight the adaption of learned behaviour and context.

For [Probyn \(2000\)](#), practices, identities and bodies are assembled through physiological, psychological and the social. Therefore, discourse is not prioritised over the physiological. Instead, experiences of the world are understood to be working arrangements of multiple ‘parts’ that are no more important than the other, always emerging differently across space and time. Bodies and materials assemble into working arrangements, or assemblages, through emotions and affects in ways that work to ‘keep’ assemblages functioning. [Probyn \(2000\)](#) argues that intensities, like shame, emerge in these assemblages as bodily intensities in relation to the other bodies, materials and discourses, which can enable identities to emerge. Each assemblage is unique, shaped by, and shaping spatial, cultural, social and historical contexts. In developing the visceral approach, [Probyn](#) makes it clear that subjectivities emerge in relation to power structures, but are not only defined by them as the material body might resist them.

[Probyn \(2000, 2005\)](#) develops this argument through a focus on

shame, arguing that bodies are affected by shame when they become ‘out of place’ in situations where people are forced to confront the ambiguous and contradictory realities of everyday life. This means people may become uncomfortable in the environment they are in, resulting in particular physiological responses (for example, blushing), which may make us act in multiple – sometimes unpredictable – ways ([Munt, 2008; Probyn, 2005](#)). Shame is not simply, however, a felt bodily experience. Thinking with visceral, bodies are affected by shame, but it is made possible by the social, spatial and physiological. For [Probyn \(2004\)](#), shame alerts us to the blurring of these discreet categories. Bodies come to feel out of place through various social and cultural conditions and therefore are affected – a physiological response registered as shame – which then alerts us to the ambiguities and possibilities of place ([Probyn, 2004](#)). Therefore, shame is made through the relations and connections between humans and more than human elements in certain assemblages.

Shame is powerful in regulating bodies, policing us based on gender, race, class, age, ability and sexuality, but is also intimate, causing reflection on, and shaping, how we live. LGBTQ + people have been forced to feel ashamed of their sexual identities, especially if they reject normative temporalities that do not align with capitalist and heteronormative agendas ([Muñoz, 2009](#)). Shame has become a powerful tool of oppression, whilst creating a celebration of P/pride ([Johnston, 2005; Munt, 2008](#)). Therefore, following the visceral line of thinking, whilst discourses and power might marginalise bodies through the visceral feeling of shame, this is not all shame does. Shame can cause us to act in unpredictable ways that lead to resistance, activism and political change.

Feminist geographers have paid explicit attention to the visceral in recent years to explore how sensation, feeling and gut reaction are bodily ways of knowing the world ([Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy, 2010; Joshi-McCutcheon-Sweet, 2015; Lavis, 2017; Longhurst et al., 2009; Sexton, Hayes-Conroy, Sweet, Miele, & Ash, 2017; Waitt & Stanes, 2015](#)). [Longhurst et al. \(2009, p. 334\)](#) suggest that a visceral geographical approach involves an exploration of:

the sensations, moods, and ways of being that emerge from our sensory engagement with the material and discursive environments in which we live. Paying attention to the visceral means paying attention to the senses – sight, sound, touch, smell and taste – which are a mechanism for visceral arousal.

For geographers, exploring the visceral is a way of understanding the ways materiality and discourse shape bodily sensations that emerge as we engage in everyday space and place, and how such sensations might mobilise bodies. [Misgav and Johnston \(2014\)](#) explore nightclub spaces in Tel Aviv to show how shame forces Trans women to avoid ‘sweaty’ areas due to the threat to femininity, whereas gay men embrace sweat as their half-naked bodies touch across the dance floor. In these examples, there is an appreciation of the ways meanings, power and identities shape ways that bodies respond and negotiate corporeality, as sensations, feeling and emotions are being remade based on spatially specific ideas of identities and materials.

Whilst geographers have examined how spaces and visceral experiences are co-constituted, there has been less exploration of temporalities and the visceral. Geographers have argued that time is embodied and experienced in many different ways by people of different identities ([Ho, 2021; Talburt & Matus, 2014; Wilkinson, 2020](#)). People who challenge normative understandings of temporality and the future may come to feel out of place and can be othered, for example, people who do not enter heteronormative relationships and do not wish to raise families ([Wilkinson, 2020](#)). At the same time, queer people may do time differently. In their research with gay men in China, [Luo, Li & Qi \(2022\)](#) argue that time becomes important through its queer potential. In this case, it is the opportunity to meet with gay men for sexual encounters and not about creating heteronormative relationships. To extend this research on temporality, I explore how temporality is visceral – experienced in

and through bodies.

I think with the visceral as a way of understanding how discourses on temporality, sexuality and the digital emerge in and through the bodies of Grindr users. By doing so, I explore of bodies are affected by shame in response to normative and neoliberal discourses on temporality, sexuality and the digital. To develop this embodied approach to the digital, I now examine previous work that explores embodied experiences of the digital.

4. Embodying the digital

Researchers have long argued that our relationships with digital technology, data and spaces are not disembodied, but constituted by embodied experience (Cockayne & Richardson, 2017; Hakim, 2020; Longhurst, 2017; Lupton, 2017; Madge & O'Connor, 2005; Mowlabocus, 2010; Taylor, Falconer, & Snowdon, 2014). For feminist and queer scholars writing on the digital, embodied experiences alert us to the ways power relations shape how people engage with digital technologies (Longhurst, 2017) and/or the 'slippages' or 'glitches' created by the embodied experiences that are unable to be 'captured' or mediated by digital technologies (Blackwell, Birnholtz, & Abbott, 2015; Conner, 2019; Lavis, 2017; Vincent & Fortunati, 2014). For example, the ways queer experiences of time and temporality do not align with neoliberal utopic visions of digital futures (Cockayne & Richardson, 2019). Attending to embodied experience then enables an understanding of the messiness of living with digital technologies, where we see how power is both confirmed and disrupted. Longhurst (2016, 2017), for example, explores the role Skype plays in mediating family life in Aotearoa New Zealand. For Longhurst (2017), the discomfort that many people feel whilst engaging in Skype sex shows the potential queerness of digital sexual relationships in that it offers 'different' configurations to the spatially normative ways that people have sex. In the remainder of this section, I focus on research which explores how LGBTQ+ people are negotiating the complicated world of digital dating apps.

Research on dating apps has begun to highlight the fractured and complicated relationships that emerge between bodies and dating apps. In the context of Grindr, Fitzpatrick and Birnholtz (2017) argue that constant negotiations are required – from profile design to meeting in person – in response to the uncertain futures of the 'outcomes'. Users of dating apps have a range of changeable 'goals' – for example, whether they are interested in a date, a partner, a friend or casual sex – that may not always match up to a profile. The future outcomes of encounters are always uncertain and anticipated in and through bodies (Bonner-Thompson, 2021) By way of managing the diversity and instability of people's 'goals', Licoppe et al (2015) argue that men who use Grindr have developed 'scripts' that can signal a person's intentions, or 'goals'. However, this may leave many users feeling ambivalent about their dating apps, which Chan (2017) argues is a result of the ways intimacies are organised by the ambiguity of relationships. For example, users must carefully construct messages to 'discover' if the user they are speaking with (via Grindr) has the same intentions. These complicated relationships do not simply characterise the use of Grindr, and other apps, but also when people want to stop using them. When people decide to 'leave' Grindr, delete the app or stop using it, it is not a singular act but involves sociotechnical negotiations – from deleting data and an account and uninstalling to separating emotions – that are open-ended and shaped by subjective experiences, times and places (Brubaker et al., 2014).

Numer et al (2019) highlight how discourses of sexual health emerge for men using Grindr in Nova Scotia, Canada, as users learn how and when they feel they can trust their partners not to transmit sexually transmitted infections. In cultural studies, Hakim (2020) develops embodied approaches to digital cultures, arguing that men's bodies are being reshaped, reimagined and reproduced in ways that are made possible by digital media in an age of neoliberalism - and the subsequent uncertainty. For example, queer men in London may use apps like Grindr to coordinate chemsex – a form of sexual encounter that uses

various recreational drugs to enhance the experience, sometimes with multiple men lasting prolonged periods – as a form of collective intimacy under neoliberal austerity that is threatening queer urban life (Hakim, 2019). For Hakim, Grindr and chemsex are not simply a threat to safety and wellbeing, but a way of living with the threats of neoliberalism. These studies highlight that being a Grindr user, and perhaps using dating apps more broadly, is not simple and requires constant learning, negotiation and work. By understanding relations between bodies and the digital, we are alerted to the messiness of the lived experiences, where the digital becomes difficult to be understood as a discreet entity that enables space/time to be easily negotiated. To explore these issues, I conducted interviews with men in Newcastle, which is what I discuss next.

5. Methodologies

This article is based on qualitative research that was conducted between August and December 2015 in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK - a post-industrial city in Northeast England. My methodological approach was feminist and queer, exploring the everyday lived experiences of bodies whilst being sensitive to the ways power shapes participants' experiences and narratives (Browne & Nash, 2010; Longhurst et al., 2009; McDowell & Sharp, 1997). Such approaches seek to challenge masculinist and objective approaches to knowledge (Haraway, 1988; Rose, 1997). Feminist and queer researchers highlighted the importance of everyday lived experiences - particularly those of women - to the production of knowledge, arguing that power, inequality and everyday experiences cannot be fully understood by quantitative methods alone. Such critique enabled discussion of emotions, bodily feeling and fleshy materiality to enter academic spaces, where stories and narratives are understood as legitimate ways of knowing (Di Feliciano, Gadelha, & DasGupta, 2017; Lloyd & Hopkins, 2015; Waitt & Gorman-Murray, 2011). However, Longhurst and Johnston (2014) have argued that these challenges are yet to be fully achieved, with discussions of fluids, flesh and sex still too 'other' for academia (Bell, 2007; Binnie, 2007; De Craene, 2017). This article seeks to contribute to this project, by exploring the lived realities of using apps for romance and sex that form the basis of geographical knowledge.

I interviewed 30 men who use Grindr, with four recording participant research diaries. The 30 participants were recruited from Grindr directly, through a research profile I set up that stated the research intentions. Once a connection with potential participants was made, I sent information sheets and consent forms via email, from my university account. Interviews took place in public places, like cafes, in Newcastle city centre or a private room in the University – participants were given the choice of locations. Once the interviews were finished, audio files were stored securely and transcribed by myself. I then coded interviews in NVivo, following a thematic approach.

The project was subject to ethical procedures at Newcastle University, UK] and their framework was closely followed. I provided all participants with information sheets, consent forms and the option to read their transcripts, and have been assigned pseudonyms. As I was also a Grindr user, I engaged in 'feminist boundary making' (Cuomo & Masaro, 2016) as a way of limiting as assumption/confusion that the interview would be/lead to romantic/erotic relations – I reminded participants that I was a researcher verbally and by using the consent forms and information sheet. I also chose to meet participants in public spaces. However, at the same time, I was required to establish intimacy and rapport as a way of discussing intimate practices. As Miles (2020) argues, moments of intimacy in research encounters can be constructed over short periods, which was reflected in this work. In the interviews, the participants and I discussed when, where, why and how they used Grindr, from profile construction, conversations and fleshy hooks up. I often waited until later in the interviews before discussing sexual practices. We spoke about the moments they did not feel comfortable using Grindr and some of their most intimate erotic acts. I was surprised

by how open many of these men were, describing their masturbatory practices and some 'awkward' and 'embarrassing' moments. I found these to be the most insightful, the ways these men spoke opened about how they felt about their identities, bodies, desires and intimacies. I now move to discuss these intimate stories to explore the ways Grindr users make sense of digital and heteronormative discourses on time and space.

6. Shameful practices: too fast

The reputation that Grindr has gained in dominant discourses has shaped the experiences of the men who use it, often in ways that affect bodies in shameful ways. Promiscuous sexual practices have often been constructed as shameful, however, these have taken new forms through the digital way of organising these encounters. In this section, I explore how Grindr users come to feel shame in being recognised as such because of the associations with numerous, risky and *instant* sexual encounters.

Jamie and John tell me about the shameful reputation that Grindr has developed, which shapes how they feel about using the app:

Jamie: Grindr's got that like reputation of being like scuzzy and sleazy, so literally I've always had this idea that Grindr is full of filthy old men that want to do outrageous things that I'm just frankly not up for, so I guess that's part of why I think I'm not going to find the man of my dreams on Grindr. ... I think it's just experience, I've had it for two and half years, nothing's happened, nothing changed, I think there's better ways to meet people than through a mobile dating app anyway.
21, White British.

John: there's a lot of time you're mainly on it for boredom, so you get kind of sick of random hook ups, but at the same time I don't really think Grindr is the place you would want to find anything more serious... as soon as you accept that, it's easier.
50, White British.

Discourses around gay promiscuous sexuality as immoral, and even dangerous (Bell & Binnie, 2006), shaped how Grindr was understood. They both construct Grindr in relation to long-term partnerships – one of many goals of using Grindr. In these examples, desires for heteronormative futures are at play and are juxtaposed against the lived realities of online dating.

Other participants discussed this in relation to a sense of shame. This shame became apparent when we discussed where and when they would use the app. Users often told me that they had apprehensions about using Grindr in public places showing concern for Grindr being seen on their phone screens, as Joel and Josh explain:

Joel: I mean I would be conscious of like people looking at the screen if I was in public or whatever, or if somebody was sat right next to me like on the bus ... so long as it's not openly visible to anyone else, I would use it anywhere.

Carl: why wouldn't you like people to see?

Joel: I don't know, I think because it, obviously it does have quite a seedy reputation, also cos of the fact that it's almost an exclusively gay app it probably has a wee bit of stigma attached to it too in like public perception.

Carl: what stigma?

Joel: just that it's kind of like tramp-ish. Plus like as well like, you might just be browsing out of boredom and clicked onto it, but I would be conscious of people, like, 'oh look at him arranging like a ride'¹, you know what I mean?

20, white Irish.

Josh: sometimes I think, oh wait I'm on the crowded metro, 'maybe I shouldn't be doing it here', and it's like the thing, 'oh fuck, what is someone is looking over my shoulder and I get a picture of a giant dick'. I kind of like don't want that in public.

32, white British.

The visibility of Grindr to a heteronormative public means that users sometimes limit how and where they use the app. Joel specifically discussed the societal perception that men who use Grindr are *only* using the app to arrange casual sex – a way of engaging in spatiotemporal practices that contradict heteronormative sexualities. In these situations, Grindr users become hyper-aware of their bodies and embodied practices, highlighting a spatially contingent shame. This shame is one way that these discourses become embodied.

This shame is felt through the body – the 'oh fuck' moment that Josh describes – forcing men to regulate their behaviours. This is made possible by the discourses that surround digital dating, queer men's sexuality and understandings of the public spaces they are in. This interplay of discourse, materiality and place, enables shame to emerge as affective intensity (Probyn, 2005), reproducing respectable and moral sexualities (Munt, 2008; Probyn, 2005). In these arrangements, Grindr becomes a visceral reminder of the heteronormative power dynamics that police queer men's sexual practices and identities.

Despite these feelings of shame, which were often on their minds, participants found different forms of pleasure and intimacies in their use of Grindr. Tom, who works in a local public sector institution, says:

Tom: because I work in [removed] I don't share photos, if I do share photos it's only of the obvious dick shot cos they all look the same... there are some days when I can literally be at work and I'll literally just switch it on, and it's three o'clock in the afternoon and I've just spent all day just chatting ... if you wanna tempt fate and invite to your office and have a little afternoon fun ... it can all be very exciting.

44, white British.

Tom uses Grindr to experience an alternative (even queer) temporality, one that contradicts how time should be spent at work. As a way of using Grindr whilst at work, Tom does not share pictures of his face, but other parts of his body that enable him to remain anonymous, negotiating the discourses that might suggest he is inappropriate for using Grindr. Tom also embodies these discourses in ways that eroticise them (G. Brown, 2008) – a visceral feeling of risk and excitement that is enabled by spatially and temporally situated discourses that police sexual and digital practices.

Jack, on the other hand, talks about the moments when shameful feelings become less important:

Jack: And it's a bit of a risk, sort of every time you meet up with someone from Grindr, you could be being catfished, could be like, you always get horror stories ... but when I'm hungover, I have met people when I've been hungover and sort of like, laid in bed, hang-over horn [a feeling of sexual arousal when hungover] sort of thing, why not?

white British.

For Jack, Grindr is always understood as a 'risky' practice due to the stories that circulate – both in the media and between users – of 'bad' encounters where anticipations never materialised (see Bonner-Thompson, 2021). Certain affective intensities can enable limiting social structures to be momentarily weakened in queer spaces (G. Brown, 2008; Caluya, 2008), which arguably lessens the urgency of the limiting discourses around dating apps.

Another participant discusses the ways that one-off sexual encounters are not as 'sleazy' as they would be imagined. Gareth tells me about intimate encounters he is sometimes looking for:

Gareth: he messaged me the night before, and he said he just wanted to spoon, and that's nice as well, we all like that. And sometimes

¹ 'Ride' is a Northern Irish colloquialism that refers to a one night stand, or hook up.

that's a preferred option cos it's intimate, it's warm, it's lovely, it's no effort. And obviously, if you're meeting someone for a kind of, for a shag you have to be in the mood, you have to have the energy, you have to make the effort, you've got to prepare. And sometimes it's just nice to go to bed with someone, sleep with someone, put your arm around someone, kiss cuddle, whatever, and sometimes I prefer that to full sex... Like we didn't have full sex last night, with this guy, it was primarily massage
42, white British

Gareth highlights an intimacy with men from Grindr that often is not included in the dominant discourses that would police queer men's digital sexual practices. In these encounters, Grindr users contest the discourses of instant, speedy and 'meaningless' sex. For Gareth, there is a slowness to these encounters, for him casual Grindr hookups require effort and time. Focusing on these intimate moments, therefore, reveals how limiting the discourses on digital dating apps can be, not fully capturing the messiness of these encounters. This messiness highlights how speed and slowness are not necessarily a binary either. Gareth locates a sexual encounter on the same night he uses Grindr (which for some would be 'too fast'), but the encounter is slow. Using Grindr here, therefore, can enable the creation of queer spatiotemporalities that resist binaries of fast/slow (Luo et al., 2022). Grindr itself is not a queer object or platform, but is assembled into different spatiotemporal arrangements where normative understandings of sexuality can both emerge and be disrupted; therefore, users can experience and negotiate shame, desire and intimacy.

In these examples, the digital discourses that suggest digital technologies enable time/space to be more efficiently negotiated do not enable a sense of pride in technological development. Instead, the discourses that cause gay dating apps as immoral, risky and dangerous, come together with these discourses on speed and are embodied, negotiated and contested, whilst the promise of erotic futures is not so easily embodied. When these discourses collide with the body, the visceral sensations cause Grindr users to become aware of how society understands certain digital and sexual practices which, in turn, must be responded to. It is in these moments where normative ideas of time and temporality are viscerally experienced. There is shame in being understood as a Grindr user by a heteronormative public which shapes how and where people use the app. For men who use Grindr then they must negotiate the heteronormative constructions of digital technologies as they move through different places. At the same time, however, such ideas of constant casual sexual encounters were not always a lived reality, with many feeling Grindr can be a 'waste of time'.

7. Wasting time: too slow

Grindr has often become understood as a platform that can offer 'instant' sex through its geolocation technologies – there is a promise that time and space can be easily negotiated to locate sexual encounters – and that Grindr can enable people to move into new spatiotemporal conditions. Of course, this is not necessarily the lived reality, requiring time, effort and constant negotiation (Chan, 2017; Fitzpatrick & Birnholtz, 2017). Grindr was sometimes understood in this way by participants – that time spent on Grindr (looking at profiles and starting conversations) was wasted as it would rarely lead to the desired outcome. This did not necessarily mean they would stop using it, but instead managed their expectations, or attempted to negotiate moments when they *felt* their time would be wasted – and this is the focus of this section.

Some of the men who used it would question the time they spent on Grindr. Jamie, for example, told me: 'you can spend hours on there, just looking... like what am I doing? It is probably bad for me, you know'. Many of the participants, often thought their time could be better spent.

Carl: you said that just recently deleted Grindr again, why have you deleted it again?

Adam: the realisation that it was causing me more stress than satisfaction, and there's the thing, particularly about these apps that seem to really 'work me up' [frustrated/angry], and I just thought 'I'm wasting my time', like I was passing a whole day just trying to get a connection with someone, having to find places to charge my phone up and, yeah I needed a break, I felt like it was keeping me in a bad frame of mind.

34, white British.

Digital technologies have the potential to reconfigure our experiences of time, either 'saving' time, creating new times, or stretching time out (Kitchin, 2014; Kwan, 2002). The effort, energy and time that goes into maintaining a presence on Grindr – including charging phones – can become a source of frustration that might have negative impacts on their well-being. The importance here is not to argue if Grindr is bad or good for well-being – research exists that correlates dating app use with poor well-being (Jaspal, 2017; Miller, 2015) – but to highlight how visceral responses, like frustration, are made sense of through their everyday practices and discourses on time and wellbeing.

At the same time, participants understood 'bad' uses of time as a product of the cultural norms associated with Grindr in Newcastle. Many participants talked about men who would 'disappear' after long conversations or just when they had agreed to meet up. When I say disappear, it may mean that users are blocked by the person they are speaking with and therefore the conversation thread would disappear, or that they just stop replying. As Russell told me:

Russell: he was like 'yeah, you wanna come round for a fuck?' And at that particular instance, I was like 'yeah sure, why not?', found out his address, told me where he was, what time to be there, and I said 'on my way' and then blocked me... I momentarily get frustrated, but after a while, it's just one of them things
28, white British

However, participants did not describe themselves as passive recipients in this, as they either took part in it themselves. One participant, James, mentioned that he was sometimes a man who would 'disappear':

James: like you're talking dirty with someone as if you're gonna meet them, but you never get round to it, but it's just that thrill of getting to it, and then you just do your own business [masturbate and orgasm] and that's it you're done. It is shit and I hate when people do it to me, but I think everyone does it.
26, white British.

There is a recognition here that 'wasting the time' of other people has become 'legitimised' and normalised as people learn to become users. As both participants mention, 'it is one of those things' that people must become accustomed to. There are spatiotemporal disjunctures in these different encounters. Grindr mediates temporal states – often sexual ones. For some participants, like James, this is immediate as he engages in sexual practices during the conversations, whereas people like Russell are hoping for other embodied spatiotemporal encounters to manifest in the future – an affective attachment to an erotic future.

Some users had found ways of sensing that a digital encounter might waste their time – following their gut instincts. Many men who have used Grindr over a long period learned to recognise when certain users may 'disappear', stop talking or block them. The following two quotes highlight how some men who use Grindr have learned to feel when men might disappear:

Joel: you can just tell when it's gonna happen, like, sometime you just know.
20, white Irish.

Zack: I'm more of a person if they wanted to meet up, 'yes when? Now? Shall we go?' As opposed to 'what are we gonna do, what you gonna wear? Are you top or bottom? Are you gonna do this?' When they start going down that road, I think quite realistically they are just getting off on it, and this is their way of getting their rocks off,

and towards the end of the conversation, they will just disappear or just not meet up. And all this you just kind of learn by using Grindr. 32, British Pakistani.

Research has highlighted how the outcomes of online dating are always very uncertain (Chan, 2017; Fitzpatrick & Birnholtz, 2017; Licoppe et al., 2015), where time feels like it is 'wasted' trying to establish connections amongst all the uncertainty (Numer et al., 2019). Some of the men I spoke with began to recognise this uncertainty, learning ways of negotiating it. Particular sentences and phrases might alert users to encounters that might feel 'wasteful'. These phrases would lead to a gut feeling that certain people only intend to chat and never meet. This gut feeling – or bodily way of knowing – is one that seems to develop over time as Grindr users become familiar with using the app in certain places.

These types of online encounters – chatting, disappearing and/or never meeting – have become recognisable for the men living in Newcastle, becoming known that this is 'what it is like' to use Grindr there. As Joel goes on to say:

Joel: I think at home [rural Ireland] like I would have had a higher success rate of actually meeting up and then I think as well, yeah, like more often you would actually meet them, whereas here, a lot of like sort of time wasting.
20, white Irish,

This is not to provide empirical 'evidence' that everyone who uses Grindr in Newcastle rarely ever meets in person, but that using Grindr is made sense of through the places that users are in. It is not just that 'disappearing men' is a known practice, but there are sets of meanings and discourses around it – ones that become sensed and known through the bodies and places. Visceral responses shape how people make sense of places and the human and more than human elements in them (Probyn, 2005). For these participants, their visceral responses are part of the ways that learn how to live with dating apps. This visceral way of knowing enables users to negotiate and manage their frustrations, making Grindr 'easier', and arguably for comfortable, to use.

Despite these feelings, many participants continued to invest in using the app. For example, Toby says:

Toby: I think there's quite a lot of hassle meeting someone that you've never met before, you've got to arrange it ... But at the same time, there's still that thrill there that you sort of could potentially meet someone that's really, really good, you find them attractive, they're good in bed, that sort of thing,
23, white British

Toby helpfully highlights the contradictory discourses and meanings that are attached to the temporalities of Grindr. Dating apps often come with the potential to meet in person – to touch, to find romance and have sex – but doing so is not as easy as popular discourse on queer digital dating might suggest. Attempting to materialise erotic encounters takes time and is fraught with difficulties – users of Grindr do not simply download the app and then have access to a multitude of sexual encounters and practices. There is a range of spatiotemporal relations to negotiate – finding times and dates that work and negotiating all of the varying different desires that other people have. Often, the promise that Grindr has to collapse time and space to facilitate sex and romance is not realised, meaning the men who use it feel as though they are wasting their time, and becoming frustrated. As Berlant (2011) has argued that in societies of socioeconomic decline, people are often left waiting and hoping for a better future. Berlant (2011) is useful here to understand Toby's (and many other participants in this section) temporal disjunctures. They are hopeful that Grindr can mediate a different future – of sexual and romantic encounters – and therefore hold onto its spatiotemporal and sexual promises despite an embodied experience of wasted time. There remains an embodied attachment to a particular, erotic or romantic, future. These temporal discourses and meanings are felt and

negotiated – many users viscerally responded to the ways they felt that they had wasted their time but also learned to follow and trust gut feelings to avoid their time being 'wasted'. There are contradictory temporalities here – the uncomfortable present and the hope for the future. These contradictory understandings of Grindr are often simultaneously emerging, which shapes how Grindr assemblages work enabling different bodily intensities – excitement, hope and frustration. These different temporalities highlight how embodied and lived experiences are out of sync with the promise of sexual (and maybe queer) futures.

8. Queering digital temporalities?

Men who use Grindr can come up against an interesting paradox – feeling shame for using an app that promises different queer sexual encounters whilst also feeling as though these sexual encounters rarely materialise. As I have shown in this article, men who use Grindr come to embody shame in being recognised as Grindr users due to the heteronormative constructions of digital sexual practices. At the same time, they may find themselves disappointed and frustrated as the app does not live up to these meanings. Therefore, the 'offer' of numerous and instant casual erotic encounters means users experience temporalities as shameful and wasted. It is here that I argue that Grindr users must negotiate an imperfect paradox of using Grindr – often forced to feel shameful about the app, whilst feeling as though using Grindr is time wasted as the promise of instant casual sexual encounters is not so readily available. It is here that we see how Grindr may not always work for the people who try to use it.

In this article, I have shown how discourses on time, sexuality and the digital come together to shape how Grindr is viscerally experienced by the people that use it. Grindr becomes too fast or too slow and this is experienced in and through the body. I have done so using feminist and queer understandings of digital technologies – as complicated and messy sets of objects, bodies and meanings. Through such perspectives, the digital is not a utopic entity that renders space and time redundant but creates a myriad of spatially and temporally uneven experiences. In other words, the digital does not work in seamless ways but is embedded in and creates imperfect systems and relations. I have highlighted this by showing how using Grindr is filled with a range of experiences, where feelings, emotions and desires are brought into being through the various (sometimes heteronormative) meanings and understanding of digital dating.

Queer approaches to temporality make space for time that is out of sync, messy and uneven (Muñoz, 2009), whilst digital technologies are presented as creating new, more efficient, time and space (Datta, 2020). Queer ideas on time and temporality, therefore, provided a unique perspective on digital technologies (Cockayne & Richardson, 2019). By taking a feminist and queer perspective, that pays attention to embodied experience, I have highlighted how digital technologies produce uneven spatiotemporalities. Grindr, as a queer dating app, finds itself in an interesting paradox. Grindr might appear to offer a temporal experience that is out of sync with heteronormative ideas of time but there are simultaneously neoliberal. As I have shown, however, this is not always the case. Users do not necessarily experience Grindr as out of sync with the heteronormative understanding of time nor in line with the digital promise of the collapse of space/time – the future that Grindr offers is not often actualised in neat or queer ways. Of course, users are not passive in this, but actively negotiating and creating other spatiotemporalities as they locate intimacy. Exploring the multiple ways that the temporalities of Grindr are experienced, I have disrupted ideas that Grindr (and digital tech) is either fast/slow, but involves a range of temporal experiences that do not neatly fit into binary understandings of time and technology.

Grindr does not necessarily enable the movement into queer temporalities but it also does not live up to neoliberal notions of the internet. Cockayne and Richardson suggest that the failure of the internet to live

up to its spatiotemporal promises (through various glitches and embodied experience) may be evidence of queerness, but what is then created when the promise of queer sexual practices is also failed by digital technologies? There is a potential glitch here, where Grindr's notion of immediacy is rarely actualised (Berlant, 2016; Cockayne & Richardson, 2019). The immediacy of Grindr could be both conceptualised as queer and neoliberal, promising non-normative sexual practices that are shaped by the speed-centric capitalist societies and the digital technologies created within. Queer researchers already voice concern for those practices, identities and bodies are co-opted by neoliberalism (Oswin, 2008; Richardson, 2005). Focusing on how these are negotiated is therefore important, to expose where disruption to normative temporalities emerge. As I have shown here, there are moments where queer spatiotemporalities are created, as users resist heteronormative and capitalist notions of time and space, but these are not always actualised through the speedy and immediate encounter. These queer and feminist perspectives then can help geographers understand and challenge dominant discourses on the digital, examining how the promise of digital tech constantly fails as bodies, desires and practices are messier than neoliberal and heteronormative ideologies, especially for those people who do not always conform to heteronormative and capitalist temporalities. What does this mean for conceptualising the digital as queer (Cockayne & Richardson, 2019). If its failings alert us to a queerness – in assemblages with other bodies, objects and places – then maybe there is a queerness. However, as it both promises and fails certain sexual futures, maybe there is something not so queer. These are no tensions that can be easily resolved, but require further investigation, taking embodied approaches to digital technologies and their spatiotemporalities.

The queer and feminist visceral geographic framework to digital spatiotemporalities that I offer here is therefore important for geographers studying the digital. By focusing on the ways a range of spatiotemporalities are effectively experienced in and through the body, I have exposed how the digital fails in its proposed futures and creates complicated and messy lived experiences. I have highlighted how discourses can shape how men who use Grindr understand themselves, their bodies and the practices, but also how they challenge and disrupt them. The visceral enables an understanding of how people are active in these processes, responding to discourses and creating their own meanings and encounters. In other words, whilst dominant discourses and meanings might be a lived experience, they are not the only experiences of using digital technology. Using the digital is not simply a 'quick' as popular discourse might suggest – there is a process of learning that is saturated with different emotions and encounters that are shaped by embodied practices, identities and digital technologies.

People are learning to live with digital technologies in complicated and ambivalent ways, trying to make sense of the contradictory discourses that we are presented with - promising to enhance our lives by doing mundane tasks to free up our time, but potentially being detrimental to our well-being and wasting our time. Taking an embodied approach to temporalities, discourses and meanings around the digital has provided insight into the ways we are coming to live with digital technologies and the positions that the digital occupies in our lives. I argue that corporeal feminist thinking is key in understanding how digital technologies (Lupton, 2017; Pink, Sumartojo, Lupton, & Heyes La Bond, 2017) and material bodies are co-constituted, revealing the practices, subjectivities and power relations that emerge, as digital technologies increasingly become part of our most intimate practices and experiences. Bringing together these queer and feminist perspectives on the digital, therefore, enables a revelation of the messy ways the digital takes shape in our lives, especially revealing the failings as academics and activists attempt to challenge the neoliberal future of digital technologies.

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Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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