# Grindr-ing Down the Walls between Physical and Virtual: Location-Based Social Enablers

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**Abstract**

Usage of location-based applications and websites has recently exploded. These tools leverage users' location information, social connections and mobility; and combine anonymity with voluntarily disclosed spatio-temporal location information to generate opportunities for geographic exploration and social interaction. The most popular of these systems designed to enable exploration of the physical environment, best exemplified by systems like Yelp or Foursquare. However, there has been both commercial and research efforts to create systems that also enable social exploration, that is finding potential new friends within a geo-located framework. Although this is a fairly complex problem domain, there have been several successful applications enabling social interaction, including Scruff, Grindr, and Mister. Interestingly, all of these apps target a single community: gay men; apps targeting a wider audience, such as Blendr or Tinder have been less successful.

These apps are at an unique intersection of areas of great interest to researchers: mobile apps, location-based services, and social networking. However, they also involve areas of emerging work, particularly for the iConference community. The first of these are questions around the initiation of *new* social ties, ones initiated in the virtual rather than physical world. Second, these applications are often geared towards dating or even just sexual interaction, and in particular, for the gay/MSM community. Are these applications taking advantage of distinct aspects of the MSM community? Or can some of the design space be re-purposed for the larger heterosexual (and/or non-dating) community?

Ideal participants in this session will have experience in studying or using these systems, and be interesting in furthering the research and design of these systems. The format of the session will be geared towards identifying key themes in proposed or on-going research; examining the literature to date; defining a research agenda and design space; and discussion of methods and ethics on how to do research, especially around sensitive matters like sexuality, dating. We hope to come out of this highly interactive session with a draft of a research space, an initial outline of the literature identifying core background ideas as well as gaps for research, and finally, the start of a community of researchers who would be interested in attending future events, as well as potential collaborators in this emerging area of research.

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