# Grindr Security Issues: China Wanted Access to Users' HIV Data

New details have surfaced since the U.S. ordered a Chinese firm to sell the gay dating app it acquired last year.

April 4, 2019 By Trent Straube

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Last month, it was reported that U.S. security experts were forcing the Chinese firm Beijing Kunlun Tech to sell its global gay dating app, Grindr, which was founded in the United States and remains popular here; Kunlun acquired Grindr in early 2018. Now, thanks to reporting by NBC's Out News, it has come to light that the U.S. security fears are specifically related to the HIV data of Grindr users.

As soon as Kunlun initiated its acquisition of the app, privacy experts worried that the Chinese government could use Grindr for espionage or blackmail. For example, Chinese officials could learn the HIV status and LGBT identities—and presumably the private sexual histories—of U.S. officials and military personnel who use the app.

Looking at leaked emails from Grindr's president, Scott Chen, NBC learned that Chen wanted to allow HIV researchers to access Grindr user data. What's more, Grindr employees—who spoke with NBC News on the condition of anonymity—told NBC that over time, Chen became more secretive about his internal communications, which led them to believe that Grindr users' information might not remain secure.

They said they became more concerned when Chen informed them that Yiming Shoa, a prominent HIV researcher for China's government, wanted to work with Grindr.

"They are attracted by our brand, reach and data," Chen wrote them in the email, according to NBC. "We need to be extremely careful about their data request. Yiming is head of HIV prevention in China CDC [a reference to the country's equivalent of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention]. We can't let people say this is about 'sharing user data with the Chinese government.'"

Chen went so far as to suggest giving a Shoa "intern" a full-time position at Grindr's headquarters in West Hollywood, California, to help do research for an HIV-related paper to be copublished with Grindr.

A Grindr spokesperson told NBC that the company did not pursue the research project beyond the early discussions. Other sources told NBC that they had not seen evidence that China had secretly accessed Grindr user data.

This isn't the first time Grindr has been criticized regarding HIV data. For more, read "Grindr Shares Its Users' HIV Info With Other Companies" from January 2018.

And in related news, the Chinese app Blued—billed as the world's largest gay app—stopped signing up new users for a brief time earlier this year over concerns that underage users were contracting HIV through dates set up on the app. For details, click here.

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