

Bates, Adam, Hobman, Trish and Bell, Beth T. ORCID logoORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6587-0336> (2019) "Let me do what I please with it [...] don't decide my identity for me": LGBTQ+ youth experiences of social media in narrative identity development. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 35 (1). pp. 51-83.

Downloaded from: <https://ray.yorks.ac.uk/id/eprint/4125/>

The version presented here may differ from the published version or version of record. If you intend to cite from the work you are advised to consult the publisher's version: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0743558419884700>

Research at York St John (RaY) is an institutional repository. It supports the principles of open access by making the research outputs of the University available in digital form. Copyright of the items stored in RaY reside with the authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full text items free of charge, and may download a copy for private study or non-commercial research. For further reuse terms, see licence terms governing individual outputs. [Institutional Repository Policy Statement](#)

RaY

Research at the University of York St John

For more information please contact RaY at ray@yorks.ac.uk

“Let me do what I please with it [...] don't decide my identity for me”: LGBTQ+ youth experiences of social media in narrative identity development.

Abstract

Social media provides LGBTQ+ youth with daily access to a broader socio-cultural dialogue that may shape narrative identity development. Through in-depth narrative interviews, the present study sought to understand the lived experiences of 11 LGBTQ+ undergraduates (*Age range* = 19 – 23) building narrative identities in the cultural context of social media, and the role of social media within this process. Interviews were analysed using an interpretative, individual analysis of personal stories. These experiences were then compared and contrasted through thematic analysis to identify four shared narrative themes. *Narratives of merging safe spaces* highlight how LGBTQ+ youth now have regular access to safe environments on/offline which facilitate more secure identity development. *Narratives of external identity alignment* describe social media as a tool for LGBTQ+ youth to seek out identities that match their pre-existing sense of self. *Narratives of multiple context-based identities* encapsulate how adolescents' identity markers are multiple and invoked in a context-dependent manner. Lastly, *narratives of individuality and autonomy* characterise how LGBTQ+ youth perceive themselves as highly individualised members of a wider community. These findings highlight the complex role social media plays within LGBTQ+ youth identity development. The implications are discussed within.

Keywords: Identity development, narrative identity, social media, sexuality, adolescence, Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer Plus (LGBTQ+), queer

25 **“Let me do what I please with it [...] don't decide my identity for me”: LGBTQ+ youth**
26 **experiences of social media in narrative identity development.**

27 Adolescence is a key developmental period for identity formation (Erikson, 1968;
28 McAdams, 2015). Defined as the transition from childhood to adulthood, it is characterised
29 by biological, cognitive, and social changes (Bell, 2016). In contemporary society, identity
30 development takes place over a prolonged period, now extending into the third decade of life
31 known as ‘emerging adulthood’ (Arnett, Zukauskienė, & Sugimura, 2014). A key feature of
32 identity development during this life stage is the emergence of the ability to construct a sense
33 of personal continuity over time and across contexts (Erickson, 1968; Pasupathi, Mansour, &
34 Brubaker, 2007). Narrative identity refers to an individual’s developing life story;
35 synthesising characters, plots, and events, and between self and society to bring an
36 overarching explanation and meaning to a string of potentially random life moments (Frank,
37 2000; McAdams & McLean, 2013; McLean et al, 2018). Sexual attraction and romantic
38 relationships are important elements of this identity development (Savin-Williams, 2005).
39 However, sociocultural expectations surrounding gender and relationships can be highly
40 complex, especially for those who experience same-sex attraction (DeVito, Walker, &
41 Birnholtz, 2018; Hammack, Thompson, & Pilecki, 2009).

42 Social media has become prominent within all aspects of adolescents’ daily lives and
43 also now plays an integral role in identity, social, and romantic relational development for
44 most adolescents (boyd, 2014; Davis & Weinstein, 2017). For Lesbian Gay Bisexual
45 Transgender Queer Plus (LGBTQ+) youth, social media plays a critical part in providing
46 opportunities to share stories of similar experiences, access sexuality-relevant information,
47 and experiment in the presentation of versions of one's self to the rest of the world (Duguay,
48 2016; Kuper & Mustanski, 2014). Thus social media provides LGBTQ+ youth with daily
49 access to a broader socio-cultural dialogue that may facilitate and influence their narrative

identity development. The present study aims to explore the narrative identity development of contemporary LGBTQ+ youth, who are the first generation to have persistent access to social media throughout their adolescence, and the role of social media within this process. Importantly, the study adopts an inclusive perspective of LGBTQ+ youth, focusing on the experiences of same-sex attracted youth who may or may not adopt conventional labelling (e.g. homosexual) around sexuality, also known as queer youths, who have been underrepresented in research examining social media and identity processes (Driver, 2007; Mathers, Sumerau & Cragun, 2018; Randazzo, Farmer & Lamb, 2015), e.g. those who identify as female as many previous studies have focused on male-identified queerness (e.g. Heath & Goggin, 2009). By using person-centred narrative interviews to understand life stories, we aim to develop an enhanced understanding of LGBTQ+ youths' cumulative experiences of developing a sense of identity within the digital age.

LGBTQ+ Youth and Identity Development

Sexual identity is an important, normative and expected aspect of identity development (Tolman & McClelland, 2011). Though difficult to accurately measure, in early and mid-adolescence, roughly 15% of youth experience a period of sexual questioning and experimentation, reporting emotional and sexual attraction to genders they themselves identify as (Carver, Egan, & Perry, 2004) and approximately 4-5% of youth (16-24) identify as same-sex attracted (Office of National statistics, 2016). However, this does not accurately capture the various sexual and gender identities individuals now project in contemporary society. Coming out and the disclosure of one's LGBTQ+ identity (rather than concealing it) is important to psychological health (Solomon, McAbee, Asberg, & McGee, 2015). Therefore, the ability to integrate sexual desire, sexual activity, sexual openness and the ability to articulate sexual identity has particular positive outcomes and benefits for LGBTQ+ individuals (Parent, Talley, Schwartz, & Hancock, 2015). However, this research often

focuses on ‘more traditional’ homonormative sexual identity descriptors such as ‘lesbian’ and much less is known about queer youth (Driver, 2007; Mathers, Sumerau & Cragun, 2018; Randazzo et al., 2015), who may identify ‘in-between’ these now established categories.

LGBTQ+ youth have not always had the freedom to express their romantic and sexual interests, and this is even more salient for less well understood subcategories such as ‘pansexual’, ‘fluid’ or ‘mostly straight’ (e.g. Randazzo et al., 2015). This process has often been characterised by negative stereotypes, homophobia and victimisation (e.g. Pearson & Wilkinson, 2013). Importantly, negative reactions by known individuals and the broader community to disclosure can diminish its positive psychological effects (Mustanski, Andrews, & Puckett, 2016). Furthermore, the cultural context for a new cohort of LGBTQ+ youth has shifted dramatically in the twenty-first century (Cohler & Hammack, 2007), with significant political and social gains towards equality (e.g. The U.K. Civil Partnership Act, 2004), and a dramatic increase in visibility of ‘alternative’ sexual identity within many areas of the modern media (Raley & Luckas, 2006). However, many of these ‘alternative’ identities are grouped into binary categories (e.g. homo- or heterosexual) and LGBTQ+ individuals spend significant time and mental energy managing how these ongoing disclosure decisions occur (Manning, 2016).

LGBTQ+ Identity Management and Social Media

The emergence and widespread adoption of social media have further shifted the sociocultural landscape for sexual identity development (Davis & Weinstein, 2017; Kuper & Mustanski, 2014). Approximately 95% of 16-24-year-olds in the UK (Ofcom, 2018) and 96% of 18-29-year-olds in the United States (Anderson, 2019) own a smartphone, with 96% of smartphone users in western societies using the internet for social media use (Office of National Statistics, 2017). These social media users actively engage in multiple digital platforms, with Snapchat, Instagram and Youtube being the most popular among 18-24-year-

olds (Perrin & Anderson, 2019). Current emerging adults or ‘Zillennials’, – born between 1995 and 2010 (Turner, 2015), are the first generation to have lived their entire adolescence with immediate and personalised mobile access to social media which continually and persistently accompanies them through all of the environments they inhabit in their daily life activities.

Social media applications offer distinct new lines of identity exploration and expression in a context largely disparate to that of previous generations (Lijadi & Schalkwyk, 2017). Scholars now argue online environments such as social media are a key functional context for healthy developmental tasks related to identity development (boyd, 2014; Haimson, 2018). They can offer a safe and accepting online environment (Craig & McInroy, 2014), ready access to information and social support (Baams, Jonas, Utz, Bos, & Van Der Vuurst, 2011), the ability to connect with peers across geographic boundaries to identify similar individuals to themselves and assist in identifying sexual partners not available offline (Miller, 2015). This is particularly important for marginalised groups such as LGBTQ+ individuals (Fox & Ralston, 2016). The anonymity and pseudonymity (e.g. exploration of social media without evidence of visitation) the internet can provide, paired with the disinhibition (Suler, 2004) and ubiquitous nature of daily public online communication increase opportunities to experiment with unexplored aspects of the self, without risk of stigma (Davis & Weinstein, 2017). As this exploration continues, social media can facilitate controlled self-disclosure within the coming out process (Fox & Ralston, 2016), assisting LGBTQ+ individuals in constructing, managing and expressing identity projections as they shift over time. Adolescents now hold in their hand the ability to continually project self-expression, self-edit, reshuffle, revise and reorganise aspects of the self, which provide new opportunity to learn from and influence a more diverse audience of others (Davis, 2012).

124 However, the complex daily decision-making challenges and how self-presentation
125 decisions are made in relation to their LGBTQ+ social media use also brings risks (DeVito et
126 al., 2018). Early online experiences were generally distinct from offline life, but as social
127 media use increases bridging the physical and digital, online identities have become more
128 consistent with offline selves (Davis & Weistein, 2017). DeVito et al., (2018) suggest that
129 due to social media use, identity presentation for adolescents is now complicated in ways that
130 are not captured by existing models of self-presentation. Adolescents are required to manage
131 the ongoing process of identity presentations both linearly across time, and latterly across
132 multiple often overlapping network profiles, with differing norms, expectations and
133 audiences (Perrin & Anderson, 2019). This process is made even more complex when
134 individuals do not fit neatly into well understood categories and can make the task of identity
135 self-definition and realignment even more complicated. It is of note that many popular social
136 media sites did not always allow users to define their own identity e.g. Facebook did not
137 expand its binary choice of gender options until 2014 (Bivens, 2017). DeVito et al., (2018)
138 reconceptualise these interactions in the form of a ‘Personal Social Media Ecosystem’
139 highlighting the task of balancing a constantly shifting set of factors between personal,
140 structural and context-based decisions to avoid stigmatisation; while still allowing the need
141 for space particularly for LGBTQ+ individuals to experiment and express LGBTQ+ identity
142 safely.

143 However, for users who face high-stakes in their use of online presentation e.g. a gay
144 Christian in conservative midwestern united states (boyd, 2014), inadvertent disclosure of
145 LGBTQ+ identity can lead to potential harassment or employment discrimination (Birnholtz,
146 Fitzpatrick, Handel, & Brubaker, 2014). As individuals tailor behaviour for certain audiences
147 within a specific context (Goffman, 1959), many LGBTQ+ users continue to intentionally
148 and surgically separate their self-presentation, tailoring performance to specific segmented

contexts (DeVito et al., 2018; Duguay, 2016; Fox & Ralston, 2016). This is particularly salient for those who have yet to, or partially transitioned in their identity realignment (e.g. coming out). Indeed, the very notion of ‘coming out’ for many presumes an established binary ‘end position’ e.g. redefinition from heterosexual to homosexual as a point of completion or fulfilment of the process, but for some queer individuals that is not the case (National Centre for Transgender Equality, 2018). The level of interactive and targeted audience provided by social media now allows highly specific self-expression (Fox & Ralston, 2016) in ways individuals were not able to previously experience.

However, the convergence of multiple disparate audiences within and across platforms, and merging of off- and online identities, has meant it is increasingly difficult to control the diverse audiences that may see specific social media identity presentations (boyd, 2014). This context collapse (boyd, 2011; 2014) - a non-intentional flattening of the spatial, temporal and social boundaries that may otherwise separate audiences on social media - leads to the risk of unintentional interactions between multiple identity presentations, and the inadvertent disclosure of LGBTQ+ identity in non-supportive contexts can have highly negative personal consequences (Birnholz, Fitzpatrick, Handel, & Brubaker, 2014).

LGBTQ+ Youth and Narrative Identity

One framework which offers a structure to better understanding these often disparate multiplicities of identity elements is through the lens of Narrative Identity development. Whenever we tell stories which ‘explain’ ourselves to others, we are guided by ‘narrative plots’, which express life stories that are far more complex than a simple catalogue of events (Sarbin, 1986). These stories are constructed from pre-existing sociocultural templates or master narratives (Cohler & Hammack, 2007; Hammack et al., 2009; McLean & Syed, 2015) that individuals rely on to tell big or small tales of a human agent embedded in a social world (Bamberg, 2006). The use of narrative, therefore, seems inherently connected to bringing

meaning to past experiences and the multiple identity presentations individuals exhibit on- and offline to their different audiences. It offers a method for investigating how individuals, within real contexts, attempt to synthesise multiple elements of identity presentation into a workable construct of coherent identity.

Hammack et al. (2009) explored the whole life experiences of 18-25 year olds who, as emerging adults, occupy an 'in-between' place characterised by attempts to make sense of the struggles of childhood and adolescence while also considering the possibility of imagined contexts of adult happiness. They argue that adolescent sexual identity development is fundamentally tied to their construction of a personal narrative, which integrates desire and behaviour into a meaningful and workable configuration in context. Combining previous research on narrative identity development and LGBTQ+ youth, they highlight three integral components of narrative identity development. The first is *narrative engagement*, which denotes the need for individuals to participate actively in those narrative elements which affect future choices or attitudes (Cohler & Hammack, 2007; Savin-Williams, 2005). Secondly, such engagement leads to a process of *identity configuration* (Schachter, 2004) which integrates the different core elements of an individual's experience that lead to a workable identity (Hammack et al., 2009; Schachter, 2004). Thirdly, narratives function to create a link between past, present and future through the identification of common life themes or tasks (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Pasupathi, Mansour, & Brubaker, 2007). This narrative sense-making (Bruner, 1990) or *meaning-making* focuses on how individuals make sense of their life experiences in relation to their own identity. This transpires most notably in the form of turning points or critical moments when a realisation or significant life event occurs (McAdams & McLean, 2013). These three components are particularly salient for LGBTQ+ youth who must reconcile potentially conflicting experiences and configure

specifically individual elements of non-normative sexual attraction, behaviour, and broader identity into a single overall sense of self (Hammack et al., 2009).

The examination of the dynamic identity formations of contemporary LGBTQ+ youth would now seem incomplete without consideration of the contextual role social media plays in that identity construction (Hammack et al., 2009). Individuals draw upon shared underlaying sociocultural templates or master narratives (McLean & Syed, 2015) (that is the stories communities tell about themselves) accessed through social media which assist in composing expectations of how life will play out. This allows them to locate and story their own life experiences within that identity negotiation, drawing upon shared narratives accessed all around, and then offering their own identity projections and expectations to others. If it is through the culture that we find the forms of storytelling, then social media now seems to be the vehicle through which these merged personal and public narratives of youth development are shared.

The Present Study

The present study explored the narrative identity development of contemporary undergraduate LGBTQ+ youth, who are the first generation to have had persistent access to social media throughout their adolescence. More specifically, it aimed to explore experiences of contemporary LGBTQ+ youth (including queer youth with identities that do not conform to traditional sexual orientations and may be underrepresented in research) building narrative identities in the broader cultural multi-context of social media, with a particular focus on the identity processes of narrative engagement, identity configuration and meaning-making. Furthermore, the study adopts a person-centred narrative approach that aims to understand the role of social media in the process of identity development. LGBTQ+ youth took part in in-depth semi-structured narrative interviews. Data was analysed by first examining individual narratives, then using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify shared

narratives themes across the pool of participant stories to understand the ways social media informs and facilitates identity development.

Method

Participants and Procedures

Emerging adults were directly recruited from a small public university in an English city-centre campus (Population: 6250, Female: 67.5%, Male: 32.5%, White, 91.2%, Heterosexual: 81.5%, LGB+ 9.6%, Cis: 93.5%, Trans: 2.7%; (York St John University, 2018) through email advertisements across enrolled class lists (e.g. psychology, social science) and university societies (e.g. Theatre, Music and the LGBTQ+ society). Participants were recruited anonymously through an online appointment system and did not have to give their details of their gender/sexual identity to be part of the study. The university has a reputation for equality; it was ranked 24th out of 434 organisations who took part in Stonewall's Workplace Equality Index (Stonewall, 2018) and the Students Union list sexual and gender equality as a key policy priority. Our aim was to understand better the situated stories of those who were 'same-sex attracted' (thus encompassing a broad definition of LGBTQ+ youth). Purposeful sampling was used to obtain information-rich cases for study (Patton, 2002, p.230). Seventeen full-time undergraduate students ($M = 20.29$, $SD = 1.40$, $Range = 19-23$) participated in interviews. Participants defined themselves as a variety of sexual and gender identities: 4 female bisexual ($n = 4$), 1 bisexual non-binary born female ($n = 1$), 2 female and 1 male pansexual/fluid/queer ($n = 3$), 2 female and 1 male homosexual ($n = 3$), and 5 female and 1 male heterosexual ($n = 6$). As the purpose of the study was to understand themes in LGBTQ+ youth identity narratives, the heterosexual participants who had clearly misunderstood the recruitment call for "same-sex" attracted youth, were excluded from the study. This exclusion occurred after data collection, as it was only during the interviews that this became apparent. This exclusion enabled us to focus in detail on the shared narratives of

the LGBTQ+ youth and foreground their experiences. Participants were interviewed individually in a neutral interview room on campus during April and May 2018. Interviews lasted between 37 and 68 minutes with the average interview lasting approximately 55 minutes. The study received full ethical approval from the relevant ethics committee at York St John University and adhered to the ethical guidelines established by the British Psychological Society.

All participants used multiple social media every day. All participants expressed relative levels of outness, but with varying degrees of how openly this was presented online (e.g. ranging from ‘liking’ LGBTQ+ posts, to open relationship representations). Seven explicitly mentioned some form of past or present religious affiliations (5 Christian, 2 Spiritual/New-Age). All participants identified as being from a low or medium socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds, though reported a mixture of city, town and rural upbringings prior to joining university. The majority identified as Caucasian ($n = 10$) which is representative of the local geographic area (86% Caucasian; Office of National Statistics, 2011).

Interview Guide and Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were employed by the first author to offer a focused yet flexible exploration of how youths’ personal life story and culture come together in narrative (McAdams, 2015). Key questions based on the McAdams life story interview (2008) where adapted to focus on what role social media played in the enactment of their identity presentation (Hammack et al., 2009). Interviews were participant led, enabling them to focus on what they considered most important, identifying critical elements (Riessman, 2008) which highlight moments participants considered significant in the development of their identity (*narrative engagement*) such as dealing with a family members death (e.g. Ricoeur, 1983/1984). They were also asked to identify turning points (McAdams, 2006) that had

required participants to understand/negotiate/express their e.g. same-sex desire, behaviour and identity and integrate them into the general life story (*identity configuration*) and how participants made sense of these lived experiences (*meaning-making*) (e.g. McAdams, 2006; McAdams & McLean, 2013; Pasupathi et al. 2007) offline and on social media. Many of the questions were explicitly focused on social media and were mapped to narrative identity elements. For example, “Can you tell me about a time when using social media in relation to your sexual identity made a significant impact to your life?”. The interviewer also played a key role in deliberately using probing follow-up questions to explore these stories in detail. The interviews were transcribed verbatim by the principal researcher from audio recordings.

Narrative Analytic Strategy

Participants’ narrative interviews were initially examined individually, allowing a holistic examination of personal stories (e.g. Kuper & Mustanski, 2014). A narrative thematic analysis (Riessman, 2008) was employed as its primary focus is on the story itself as the unit of analysis (the content of the data is what is said). Firstly, memos and initial observations were noted throughout transcription, taking a critical self-reflective approach (Riessman, 2008) in the form of open coding. Possible within-person critical elements that created a behavioural renegotiation of their identity were labelled, which could come in many forms (e.g. significant experiences of bullying). Relevant text was identified and then possible narrative coding themes were built around these.

After individual stories had been examined by the lead researcher, a reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019) was employed to identify similar prominent codes across participant’s stories. All coding (both within and between participants’ stories) was performed by the first author, with the second and third author providing support and guidance by looking at a small subset (two transcripts). This approach is consistent with Braun and Clarke who advocate one author performing all coding (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Themes were then created that link together common and contrasting elements to form a pattern of narrative identity development among participants, in an iterative manner through discussion between authors. After identifying these common and contrasting narrative themes (Frank, 2000), experiences were contextualised in relation to the broader sociocultural context. Particular attention was paid to how individuals felt they held agency and voice through their use of social media, and how this interacts with social context in mutually impactful ways, connecting their individual meanings to *“more global assumptions and worldviews held by individuals within the culture under study”* (Riessman, 1993, p. 61).

As qualitative research is co-created in nature (Riessman, 2008), the authors position requires identification as this will have had some effect on the participants’ choice of shared stories (Riessman, 2008), his role in identifying, synthesising and selecting narratives, and then reporting them to the reader (Josselson, 2011). The primary researcher who performed the interviews and initial analysis (with input from two co-authors who also looked over coded interviews and discussed coding and themes) is a white male in his early 40’s, self-described as ideologically liberal, and has worked in UK Secondary Schools (11-19-year-olds) teaching Sex Education, Psychology, and Religious Studies for 17 years. His motivation for study was rooted in multiple students who had come to seek counsel on issues related to complex sexual and gender-related issues in the past, and as a cisgender heterosexual white male, wished to understand the lived experience of LGBTQ+ youth better and assist other allies in future support. To ensure the validity of the research’s interpretation of these findings, after the report was produced, the analysis was verified by independently checking themes against the original recordings and transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The results and discussion section of the report were then shared with a sample of participants as a form of member-checking, who were asked to indicate the extent to which the report reflected their own experiences and that of their contemporaries. The participants suggested minimal

revisions indicating that the findings did arcuately reflect their experiences, and the quotes used had not been misrepresented.

Results

Across the dataset, four inter-related narrative themes (with sub-themes) were developed that encapsulate LGBTQ+ youths' experiences of social media during the process of narrative identity development: (1) *Narratives of merging safe spaces* which highlight regular access to safe spaces on/offline which facilitate more stable identity development; (2) *Narratives of external identity alignment*, illustrating a desire to be known for 'Who I already am'; (3) *Narratives of multiple context-based identities*, identifying a rejection of a single sexuality-based core identity; and (4) *Narratives of individuality and autonomy* which outline highly individualised members of a community. Names and place names have been anonymised to preserve the anonymity of participants.

1. Narratives of Merging Safe Spaces Off/Online

1.1 Safe spaces facilitate stable identity development. Participants' stories of forming identity projections that reflected aspects of their sexual identity highlighted how engagement in such projections was only possible when they felt safe. These projections were important aspects of their story as they ultimately led to a more secure sense of identity. All participants reported regular and easy access to contexts for safe and open expression in their present experiences, feeling 'safe and accepted' as LGBTQ+ youth in nearly all situations on- and offline. When Sharron reflected on the theatre production group she is part of, she notes regular and positive expressions of support:

... I think a lot of people like weren't out at the start of the year, and throughout the year it's sort of [I: Mmm] come out that people are gay or bi or trans or whatever because I think people, people realised that they would be accepted no matter what (Sharron, 19, bisexual)

She highlights a common story told by participants - that the social environment on- and offline now affords security when expressing non-normative identity across

environmental contexts. It did not mean others claimed to understand their exact sexual or gender identity, but there was an acceptance that their expression of a ‘differing’ identity would not diminish their friendships. One of the critical turning points shared by many participants is that of their coming out stories, which straddled the on- and offline world. Although on balance these were all positive experiences, stories varied in format, and even in homes where individuals’ felt safe and accepted, some participants expressed apprehension. Sarah who has experienced significant friendship rejection in the past, remembers having ‘no issues’ when coming out to parents, but possibly due to internalised stigmas (evidenced in past research examining master narratives such as struggle and success e.g. Savin-Williams, 2005) and past experiences she:

... refused to tell my dad, I made my mum tell my dad [because he] grew up with a religious background and he never ever ever said anything against it, like anything like that, but it was just one of those things I just couldn’t face doing it. I was like I can’t, I can’t tell him. It’s really funny because he ends up off sick from work the next day, and I was at home because I had no classes on, and I was like for god sake, so it was just me and my dad and we just like made lunch, and it was like really awkward, and we ate lunch and he just stood up and just went ‘give me a hug, I don’t care as long as you’re happy’ and I started crying, and I just remember my dad was like ‘why are you crying’ and I was just like ‘I’m just really happy’. (Sarah, 19, Bisexual)

Although occasionally experiencing initial fears of rejection, many felt their relationships had been enriched by sharing sexual or gender identity transitions even if only in a developing form with family members, leading to a more positive sense of self.

1.2 Social media is a safe space. Participants’ stories of safety and acceptance had translated from ‘safe’ online environments into participants’ offline contexts. In line with previous research (e.g. Duguay, 2016), online is largely a safe space for many LGBTQ+ youths. Xander, the oldest participant, who identifies as queer and uses the pronoun ‘he’, was bullied offline for much of his early childhood. Here, he reflects on his experience before accessing social media:

In terms of forming identity I think it's good, because there are lots and lots of people putting their own experiences forward, and that makes room for validation and self-

discovery, and I think, you know, 11-year-old me wouldn't have gone through that oh my god everyone around me's straight, and I'm gay, if I had social media because I would have seen there were more people out there. (Xander, 23, Queer)

Feeling safe and accepted within social media environments often stemmed from the sharing of similar experiences with others, many of whom were not known to participants in the offline world but offer a space to explore their non-normative, but still developing identity and allows an opening of a dialogue (both intra and interpersonally) about how they may go about defining this difference in identity. Sarah remembers the first time she shared her potential LGBTQ+ identity with a friend she considers close, but has never met offline:

No, never met her [I: right, OK], no, a lot, a lot of these people I haven't met, erm and I think, I think, I can't remember what it was, I think my friend, one of my other friends, she just, she just come out as gay, and I was like 'I don't know how to handle this cause I was, cause I like, I feel exactly the same as she does, but I'm like I don't really know how to talk about it [I: right] because it was never, no one ever talked about us where I was from, I didn't think I knew anybody [I: hmmm] at that point, [I: yeah] that I knew of anyway.

Participants reported experiencing safety in social media environments due to privacy settings. This allowed participants to express identity as privately or as publicly as they wished. Paul/a who had a positive critical turning point during a counselling session, recounts their decision to start subtly shifting the information their family has access to:

... you can set posts that people, not everyone, can see [I: Yeah] so I have like, er, certain style of post which pretty much all the adults in my family life, they are just blocked from seeing certain posts [I: Yeah] that I post, and those are normally the ones that are about gender and identity and sexuality and stuff like that, I've started kinda of, kinda, creeping into showing them more stuff [I: Yeah] cause if I don't have to come out to them, and they just know, that's so much easier [I: laugh], If my grandma came to me and was like, are you, are you not... a girl, are you not straight, I'd be like no, I'm not, and that would be so much easier than to sit her down... (Paul/a, 20, Nonbinary bisexual born female)

This seems to identify a dual function for participants, offering both a level of security and control which gives the participants the ability to choose how, when and with whom they will express their LGBTQ+ identity, allowing more gradual and nuanced coming out

experiences; but also initiates potentially ‘difficult’ conversations with older relatives controlled by the participant.

2. Narratives of external identity alignment

2.1 ‘Who I already am’ drives meaning-making. In nine interviews, participants expressed a desire to be known for ‘who I already am’. This desire to align the inner self with external self-presentation seemingly drives meaning-making for LGBTQ+ youths. A critical aspect of most identity narratives related to the process of self-definition. Participants, like Sandy described past experiences of searching to find identity labels that matched what was *already* inside:

I was like maybe I’m nothing [laugh], so I went through that for like 2 years, then I got to Middle School which is like, 12, 13, and I was like ‘hmm maybe I’m bi’ [I: Yeah], that didn’t work either [I: laugh] so I’m trying all these things, and then, recently when I got to uni I thought, I’m probably pansexual, cause that, it, I was struggling with like, the boundaries [I: Yeah], because I understand the necessity like, of labels but that also wasn’t working, [I: Yeah] so I’ve just started saying that I’m queer [P/I: laugh] which covers everything, but not to say that I am everything, it just covers all grounds, because it’s just people at the end of the day. (Sandy, 19, Queer)

Sandy’s story highlights a common dissatisfaction that labels, even many found already within the LGBTQ+ community, do not fit pre-existing selves. This desire to be known externally for who they *really are* influenced online self-presentations. Though online presentations did not have to completely align with internal identity, most acknowledged that their social media presentations were now close proximities to their perceived self. When Xander considered his self-presentation, he noted that social media offers the ability to transcend physical restraints:

I think they are close, but, also, not at all at the same time, because they are, it is a, erm, cherry-picked version of yourself you know, you’re putting, my own twitter tends to be consistently positive and productive updates, and it’s not, I, a long time ago steered away from posting kind of moany things or like, oh I’ve had the worst day or whatever, that kind of stuff, unless I felt it was contributing to a necessary conversation

None of the participants used social media to create an entirely different persona online. Instead social media was used to facilitate self-presentations that were true to their inner selves. There was a shared understanding that social media enabled a ‘cherry-picked’ presentation that could be used as an opportunity to safely project their inner self, or desired ideal self, to an external audience. Identity relevant information could be released over time, first segmented using social media, then slowly opening privacy settings to reveal an identity projection shift to a broader audience. This could entail posting subtle pictures with a same-sex partner, or attraction-based commentary first on- and then offline possibly to avoid context collapse by pre-empting unintentional information leakage (boyd, 2011, 2014). For instance Paul/a described recently using social media more to disclose their LGBTQ+ identity:

... the trans awareness video, I posted that on my Facebook without putting the blacklist on [I: Yeah] so that was kind of like, my caption also kind of implied that I was non-binary, though obviously, the video says it explicitly, so I'm gonna post this, and see if anyone comments on it... And I think a couple of like my aunts or something did like it, so I'm like, ok so cool, so they know... but erm, my grandparents didn't mention it, but like, I kind of want to start... doing that more and I feel like social media is... helpful for that, because I'm a bit naff at like talking about serious things face-to-face.

2.2 Terminology and labels. Terminology and ‘labels’ were both loved and loathed by participants, and were key stories in all interviews. Tim, who has several long-term mental health issues, described social media as a very positive device for self-understanding and meaningful interaction:

I'm a huge fan of labels... there's plenty of people within the LGBT community that say oh let's do away with labels and be, you know like, be that kind of thing. I'm not of that opinion; I am of the opinion that I need, an identifier, I can't just say I'm me because that's too broad... I can say I'm me, and me constitutes these different characteristics [...] social media is good for identifying labels because there are boxes to fill in that says, gender, pronouns, sexuality, that kind of thing, you can use social media to give that list of who you are, that kind of, you know, slightly more publicly identify... (Tim, 23, Homosexual)

482 For Tim, who identifies as a well-understood term in contemporary society, labels give
483 a framework to understand himself and bring a name to his internalised state. Labels also
484 helped him to better contextualise his relationship with others, allowing him to understand
485 who he is in relation to others and be a 'better friend'. However, other participants found
486 labels could be complex, problematic and misleading. For example, Polly when defining her
487 own identity said:

488 ... generally, I'd say bisexual, but I prefer pansexual, but people don't know what that
489 is and think you're doing weird things to woks... I think I don't... I've never really
490 like been like specifically attracted to one gender; it's kind of the person... And I'm
491 not a big fan of labels as they are quite restrictive [...] having one word you can use
492 to get across something that can be quite complicated [...] that's when it causes
493 problems, because everyone's got a different idea and it's so personal that people get
494 quite defensive when they disagree (Polly, 19, Pansexual)

495
496 Polly suggests there are many ways to conceptualise both sexuality and gender, and it
497 is unnecessarily limiting to express sexual attraction in the narrow way labels provide. This
498 need for customisable terminology was an underlying theme in most interviews, but was
499 most evident when interviewing those that identified as 'non-binary', 'pansexual', 'fluid' or
500 'queer'. When asked if 'queer' was a useful label, Xander replied:

501 I'm not sure, I think because queer used to be such a vitriolic word I know that a lot of
502 people struggle with it, people still hear it as a slur, so they don't want to identify as it,
503 erm, for me, it's more just like an umbrella of, like a... a straying away from labels
504 even though it is essentially a label in itself, it's a label to kind of cover everything...
505 Its identifying as something without tying it down its... Yeah, erm, I think it's
506 difficult because its, we talk about identity through labels [I: Yeah] and when you're
507 the sort of person who identifies away from labels, there's, it's really hard to
508 communicate that because so often people want to know what's your sexuality,
509 what's your gender identity...

510
511 He identifies as 'queer' to express a fluid identity, which for him means he could
512 identify as multiple or differing genders and be attracted to individuals who identify in ways
513 that change day-to-day and reach beyond the simplistic male-female binary. Like Polly, he
514 consciously holds the tension of acknowledging the need to identify in some way and the

515 importance in denoting some non-normative state, while rejecting labels due to their
 516 imperfect nature.

517 **3. Narratives of multiple context-based identities**

518 Non-normative sexuality was perceived as a core identity status for participants when
 519 first acknowledging their internal sexual desires, and again when transitioning to their use of
 520 external labels with others. However, after this initial period, these became only one of
 521 several key identity markers. Tim clearly articulated this when expressing his identity as a
 522 ‘gay, male, recovering Christian, geek’. When asked to explain what he meant, he said:

523 Mostly in the past it depends what takes precedence, erm, so, so so at the moment, like,
 524 gay is the pri, is my primary identifier at the moment because erm, I just co, come out
 525 of a relationship looking at other guys you know, so my head is in that kind of mode.
 526 Whereas a couple of weekends ago, erm, er, when we had the [Club society night], I
 527 was in geek mode [I: Yeah] and that was my overriding identifier... its probably more
 528 the context, if something's going on that's... driving one particularly area of my identity
 529 [... but] if I could only pick one [I: Mmm], it would have to be geek.

530 Not only does Tim identify multiple overt identities which he shares across off and
 531 online audiences, but also comments on a hierarchy of identity statuses, which shifts in
 532 different contexts. Many participants reported that they felt LGBTQ+ identity was now
 533 accepted and ‘normal’ across audiences on and offline to their family and friend. Although it
 534 was still an important identity marker, it did not necessarily merit special attention and they
 535 did not purposefully compartmentalise these multiple identity projections online. Paul/a
 536 highlighted that sexuality, and gender, are so normalised in their mind that, similarly to Tim,
 537 context on and offline often drives their consideration of identity:

539 I think at the moment, like, when I was younger, you know, the last few years I think
 540 my identity gender and sexuality wise was really important, and it was kinda
 541 something I was very out and loud and proud for a lot of time, but I’m, over the last
 542 you know, year or so, I’ve kind of mellowed out a lot about it a lot [I: Yeah] it’s just
 543 kind of, I want people to know just so that they, you know understand and respect me
 544 and then I don’t have to come up with a billion questions, but... I think now I’m older
 545 it’s kind of yea, I want other people to see other parts of me whilst also still
 546 understand that this, this major part of my identity you know [I: Yeah] my gender, it's
 547 as important to me as someone else's is like, men can be very territorial about you
 548 know their own masculinity, women are very like, I’m a women this is what I am,

549 and, you know I feel the same way about mine, it's just other people think that, there
 550 must be more emphasis on it because, it's kinda divergent from the you know, the
 551 norm

552
 553 For participants, living within a sociocultural space that is now largely accepting of LGBTQ+
 554 identities meant the need to pay sexuality or gender more attention than other aspects of
 555 identity was lessened. When Xander was asked if sexuality was prioritised in his identity
 556 development, he responded:

557 It's really not, I think the experiences related to growing up with the queer sexual
 558 identity, those are important, erm, because they form aspects of your personality [I:
 559 Yeah] and how you treat people, but it's, the label itself is, I mean I'm not interested
 560 in it at all, that's why I identify as queer as [I: Yeah] I just think, and I actually get
 561 quite frustrated when it's the first thing people see or talk about, you know, erm, like
 562 when you're the gay best friend or whatever for instance [I: laugh] erm, that's
 563 frustrating as it's very very reductive [I: Yeah], and really, it doesn't actually say
 564 anything about a person – their sexuality, erm, beyond what they want to say [I:
 565 Yeah] but people make an awful lot of assumptions when it comes to labels

566
 567 Though presenting as the significant core identity when first coming out, this over
 568 simplified view of their sexuality becomes only one of several defining identity markers over
 569 time (even for those with less familiar identities e.g. queer) and participants aim is often to
 570 open these differing identity contexts for others to better understand them.

571 **4. Narratives of individuality and autonomy**

572 **4.1 A community of individual experiences.** Stories of individuality within
 573 community were shared by many participants. Ownership of highly personalised identity
 574 labels unique to each individual was felt to conflict with membership of a broader group
 575 identity at times, and the validity of other interpretations of the same labels. Xander describes
 576 how his personal identity is balanced with a communal understanding of being LGBTQ+:

577 People just tend to assume an awful lot, and it's like, like, cause I was actually gonna
 578 write about this, about being in a post coming out society, whereas beforehand, you
 579 had to come out and tell people for them to know, which people still do, but then now
 580 it seems more there's that much kind of awareness of different sexualities, you almost
 581 have to say, no, come out twice like people will come, make you come out because
 582 they'll assume what your sexuality is, and then you have to come out again and say
 583 actually no, that's not, I am coming out but not in the way you think I am.

584

585 His experience of what he calls a ‘post-coming-out’ culture is one where people
586 accept non-normative sexuality, but immediately attempt to categorise what they perceive
587 that non-normative sexuality to be. This removal of personal autonomy over his identity
588 status is difficult, as although we may all present with a multiplicity of identities, his identity
589 is itself a fluid process that shifts across time and context on a daily basis. Xander continues:

590 I’d explain how fluid identity is, and how it’s not, you know [I: Yeah] erm, so rigid,
591 cause I think there’s this understanding that if you’re not one thing, you are the other,
592 like it, you have to fit somewhere and if you don’t fit somewhere then your feelings
593 aren’t real [we need] to stop thinking in umbrella generalised terms, cause what it
594 means, because even if you choose a specific label, for like gay, what it means to be
595 gay for one person is completely different for another person [I: Yeah] and there is
596 such diversity in that

597
598 He acknowledged now living in a society where confrontation of heteronormative
599 stereotypes is less necessary, and one can establish oneself as different. However, he noted
600 that care must still be taken even within the LGBTQ+ community to respect the dynamic
601 evolving differences between individuals as identities intersect in multiple and varying ways.
602 This was a view shared by others, as Polly noted:

603 I learned about non-binary, gender fluid and, like grey gender and agender, not that
604 it’s, if you’re trying to be inclusive as an LGBT community you can’t, exclude
605 someone from your field of eligible just because they don’t match up with a binary
606 identity, so this group of individuals is possibly a better way to look at this
607 community now.

608
609 Inclusion by difference seems both a complex but imperative community task for
610 LGBTQ+ youth, who are often grouped together due to difference. This was also evident in
611 participants’ discussion of high-profile LGBTQ+ individuals. Paul/a, a self-professed movie
612 buff, highlighted how famous LGBTQ+ role models could help some people to understand
613 their identity choices, but was not helpful to them (Paul/a) because they (Paul/a) did not feel
614 these fully represented their (Paul/a’s) personalised identity:

615 ...it’s hard for me to explain to other people so... I know a lot of people who are
616 trans, who since you know, erm, Caitlin Jenner, and Laverne Cox and all these [I:
617 Hmm] icons kind of [I: Yeah] became public about being trans, they found it much
618 easier to come out as trans because they had these cultural pinpoints that they could

say to their parents, like [I: Yeah], I am like this [I: Yeah], where I feel with non-binary and even still bisexuality its... there's a lot less representation, so it's a lot harder to be, there's no one person that I can be like, oh grandma – I'm like this.

4.2 Social media and autonomy. Permeating through all interviews, was the

participant's desire for autonomy and control over their own personalised labels. Participants reported that social media offers a space unconstrained by physical appearance or social interaction difficulties, in which they had explored identity labels as part of a desire to match these to pre-existing internalised concepts (See *narratives of external identity alignment*). The ability to choose more accurate personal expressions when pre-existing labels did not match internalised self-concept was a critical factor for Paul/a who remembers first seeking out new ways to better express their shifting sense of identity online:

I saw trans first, I kinda saw that and I tried, I dabbled in it for a little bit, and I was like, owwww, this still doesn't fit, erm, but then at one point I saw the phrase non-binary and I was like, Oh! There we go, that's it! It's just this in the middle thing... erm of not really aligning yourself to any specific gender, just kinda being this weird... purple thing [I: Laughs] in the middle [because...] if boy is blue and [I: Yeah] girl is pink, er reddish, then non-binary is kinda this entire gradient of purple

Many participants narrate the positive function of social media which allows new expressions of identity projections and offers space to disseminate them to others. When considering how people share their identity on and offline today, Sarah observes:

...similar to like pronouns, you use the pronouns that people ask you to use, you use the names that people ask you to use, if they ask you not to use a name, you don't use that name [I: yeah], and I think that's, that's really important and it's, it's not even about acceptance, it's about like tolerance and like, just, decency, like com, it's like common [I: yeah] decency to use the name that people want you to use... sometimes I will say lesbian or something like I'm gay, like, sometimes I will say that, and it's like one of those things where it's like my identity let me do what I please with it but don't like, don't decide my identity [I: hmmm] for me

Through autonomous ownership of a self-defined personal identity, participants were able to project a coherent internalised self, but with multiple identity presentations, which co-exist to the world. By providing participants with exposure to a multiplicity of labels as well

as the facility to self-designate identity labels, social media was confirmed as integral to a contemporary experience of this process.

Discussion

The present study aimed to understand the experiences of contemporary LGBTQ+ youth building narrative identities in the broader cultural context of social media, and the role of social media within this. A narrative thematic analysis was employed, which first focused on individual participants' life stories, and then compared and contrasted them across participants, leading to the identification of four key themes within narratives: (1) *Narratives of merging safe spaces*, (2) *Narratives of external identity alignment*, (3) *Narratives of multiple context-based identities*, and (4) *Narratives of individuality and autonomy*.

Narratives of merging Safe Spaces

Participants' stories were consistent with previous research (e.g. Fox & Ralston, 2016) highlighting online experiences as safe spaces that perform multiple beneficial functions (e.g. access to networks for specific information) in relation to identity development. Participants such as Paul/a and Polly saw benefit in the use of multiple social media sites to compartmentalise information (such as Facebook) when performing specific identity tasks dependent on the audience (Fox & Ralston, 2016). This was particularly valuable during early identity exploration and transition work (Haimson, 2018), enabling adolescents to perform various types of identity work safely in ways not previously available.

Though past research has focused on this hiding or compartmentalisation of information for specific audiences (e.g. Devito et al., 2018), our participants' narratives centred around projections of identity which were still multiple but purposely made more open to audiences. Participants attributed feelings of safety online with a decision to open contexts (across online platforms and offline) which portrayed a more authentic form of identity presentation. Rather than pursuing identity presentation that were segmented across

different on and offline contexts, participants described experiencing identity development in a cultural environment that seems largely accepting of non-normative sexuality and gender. The increasing cultural normalisation of LGBTQ+ identities meant previous stigma and templates of how ‘normal’ life will play out (i.e., master narratives of struggle and success e.g. Savin-Williams, 2005) were significantly weakened and no longer seen as inevitable or expected for our participants. That is not to say that participants did not face negativity on and offline. Certain online platforms were still favoured for certain tasks, and there was an acknowledgement by participants that some platforms such as Tumblr were more ‘queer’ friendly than others. However, for our participants, these different tasks were not usually segmented from view to a wider audience. For instance, Polly told a story of friends from her childhood who had come across projections of her sexual shifting identity on Facebook (not an expected platform for such information within some studies) and they had responded negatively on her profile. Multiple allies rapidly responded in her defence, and this like many of our participants only heightened their expectation that they had the right to express their identity within and across any form of social media they desired.

Narratives of External Identity Alignment

The internal desire to be known for ‘Who I already am’ seemed to drive narrative engagement and meaning-making for LGBTQ+ youth. Stories told by Sandy, Xander and Tim included an early realisation that their internalised self-concept did not match their external presentation. Acknowledgement of an internalised dissonance between who participants perceived themselves to be and how others perceived them on and offline was catalysed through critical moments (e.g. counselling) and turning points. This promoted new levels of narrative engagement, encouraging participants to reconsider and re-story past experiences, as they sought alignment of their internal perception(s) with their external presentation of self. As Xander and Sandy’s stories illustrate, this search for terms and labels

to match pre-existing internal self-concepts is not merely the exploration or *trying on* of new versions of self, but rather an active reconfiguration and ownership of labels as a result of an already internalised, if still developing state.

This is an important reframing. Previous research suggests youth *experiment* with different identities and *then* choose one (e.g. Hillier & Harrison, 2007) including on social media. However, in our study, youths expressed a desire to change external identity presentations when they felt their internal sense of who they *already are* did not match their external presentation to others. Disconnections between internalised identity and external presentation or ‘identity gaps’ (Faulkner & Hecht, 2011), led to attempts to balance out disparities, initiating the process of narrative engagement that ultimately led to a more successful shift in identity configuration and thus overall sense of self through meaning-making. Social media was positioned as a powerful tool in the bridging of these identity gaps by providing LGBTQ+ youth with the facility to explore and engage in the creation of identity presentations and shared narratives which reflect their present but shifting experiences even if they did not fit within conventional LGBTQ+ identity categories (e.g. Xander and Paul/a). This echoes Haimson’s (2018) Social Transition Machinery theory which suggests the identity realignment youth experience on social media should be reconceptualised as a new rite of passage. By enabling the projection of multiple identities simultaneously, adolescents and emerging adults are able to present in different ways in different contexts and this significantly assists in disclosure choices over time and in differing environments. For example, participants echoed previous findings that Tumblr is often used more for exploration and experimentation, while Facebook is employed for more formal identity transition disclosure (Haimson, 2018). Furthermore, our findings extend this work, suggesting the aim for our participants was to eventually open up these multiple and differing

identity presentations online in conjunction with offline identity presentations to offer a more authentic if sometimes contradictory projection of identity across contexts.

Narratives of Multiple Context-Based Identities

Consistent with past research, participants expressed acceptance of the overlapping interconnected nature of social media, and the complex task of managing a changing identity presentation with a potentially permanent disparate lifetime digital footprint (Davis & Weinstien, 2017). Though fragmentation and context compartmentalisation were described as helpful in the early stages of identity development, audience segmentation was much less prevalent in participants' stories than has been previously documented (e.g. DeVito et al., 2018; Haimson, 2018). Participants such as Xander highlighted the tension between the permanence of many social media channels such as Instagram that encourage socially desirable presentations, and an acceptance by contemporary LGBTQ+ youth that it was still important to express changing, disparate and momentary identity projections that may not necessarily reflect their preferred overarching identity. Some participants outlined a move towards ephemeral social media such as Snapchat, which provide low stake ways to express in-the-moment identity projections (Davis & Weinstien, 2017). However, many of our participants now in emerging adulthood found this segmentation, along with the use of multiple accounts (e.g. Finstagram) as 'trying too hard' and was almost seen as a childlike response by some of our participants. Most instead perceived themselves as a bundle of different identities portrayed over time and across contexts. These were not hidden or segmented for particular audiences, but rather participants expressed an expectation of the right to openly portray shifting multiple identity projections simultaneously, while still synthesising an overall identity.

Participants narrated a comfortableness with this view of identity presentation and emphasised the opportunities the internet provides for actively crafting and expressing their

multidimensional identity projections, and then chose key identifiers to drive interactions dependent to context (Weststrate & McLean, 2010). Participants told stories in which sexuality was only one of several identity markers. For example, Tim primarily chose to identify as 'geek' before any traditional sexual designation, but acknowledged how identity projections interact in multiple ways, e.g. His favourite shows also featured pro-sexual/gender diversity characters such as DC's The Flash or Supergirl.

As the interconnected nature of social media platforms continues to flatten (boyd, 2011, Haimson, 2018), rapidly developing technology now retooled for the social world offers the ability to synthesise and project intersecting identity expressions already existing within individuals (Crenshaw, 1989). Participants such as Tim and Polly appear to be attempting to align an understanding which has been long accepted within offline interactions, that an individual tailors' behaviour for certain audiences within a specific context (Goffman, 1959). As social media now allows *others* to simultaneous access an individual's presentation of multiple 'moments' written across time responding to these different contexts (including potentially more fluid and queer identity expressions), contemporary online social norms mean youth no longer expect to access a static identity projection of any given individual. Rather it was portrayed that individuals present themselves as a suite of shifting contextually based identity presentations with no single identity presentation offering the holistic sum of their identity.

Narratives of Individuality and Autonomy

Past research has documented the individuality and diversity of LGBTQ+ youth identities and how simplistic category labels (e.g. gay) masks nuanced experiences (Hostetler & Herdt, 1998). Many of our participants' stories (such as Sandy or Polly) initially began identification with a simple sexual label, of the type often found in quantitative data sets (e.g. gay, lesbian). However, as their stories unfolded, they narrated a much more complex set of

experiences that required the reconfiguration of sexual descriptors (e.g. pan/queer/fluid) to represent a more nuanced identity that also intersected with wider social classifications such as gender. Such nuanced understanding of identity are important - recent studies have highlighted the differing and distinct experiences of discrimination, stress and psychological health across such identity intersections (e.g., Corrington, Nittrouer, Trump-Steele and Hebl, 2019). By acknowledging how an individual's multiple identities intersect (Crenshaw, 1989), social media offers the ability to tailor new identity configurations of personal and cultural narratives for specific groups (e.g. Queer and of colour) which emphasise autonomy, individuality and choice. For instance, Sarah or Paul/a's stories serve dual roles of both producer and product of discourse on sexual and gender identity (Hammack et al., 2009). By taking control of contexts and opening up multiple identity presentations which co-exist simultaneously, they demonstrate agency which seemed to challenge and reject, rather than continue to replicate the monolithic notions of sexual and gender identity development of previous generations (Driver, 2007; Hammack et al., 2009).

By creating autonomous multi-layered identity configurations online, participants were able to employ a more elaborate integration of personal narratives and meaning-making into an overall coherent identity configuration. This rejection of previously prescribed plotlines and characters (Polkinghorn, 1988) even led to questioning the need for a consistent identity altogether. Xander and Sandy employed more 'open' ambiguous terms such as 'queer' to denote the fluidity of identity allowed them the ability to express a moving *beyond* label categorisation, rather conceptualising a non-consistent identity *as* their core identity. It is of note that by taking control and expressing their different identity labels and projections as publicly or privately as they wished, all participant stories were of things getting better. This did not mean they had no past or present negative interactions, but they no longer felt they had to engage on Tumblr to share queer identity expressions safely, or Facebook was

off-limits for fluid identity expressions. The wider cultural access social media now offers across time and context, empowers adolescents and emerging adults to adopt identities that do not 'fit' within traditional hetro- and homonormative expectations (master narratives) which may have once led participants to consider themselves deviant (Herek, 2007).

Implications

By offering a person-centred exploration of participant-led narratives, the present study provides an enhanced understanding of how LGBTQ+ youth and particularly those who do not identify within more established identity categories (Mathers, Sumerau & Cragun, 2018), synthesise a coherent sense of identity in the complicated multi-context of contemporary society that straddles two overlapping worlds; offline and online. Our participants told stories of narrative engagement, identity configuration and meaning-making within their identity constructions which were actively shared across multiple contexts. Participants expressed themselves as highly self-reflective individuals, aware of their online identity expressions (Davis & Weinstein, 2017) and how their presentations and ecosystems interact, both off and online. Rather than attempting to 'edit' or revise a past history of their own lives (Safranová, 2015), participants accepted that permanent evidence of past identities is an inherent feature of the digital world (Davis & Weinstein, 2017). Changing expressions of identity over the course of adolescence were instead integrated into their overarching life story, and these early identity projections - or 'origin stories' - were an important expression of who they had been.

This has important social implications. Although youth consider social media to be a safe space, their data may be used in ways that they did not intend. Previous papers have recommended that App designers and social media companies need to provide still more explicit safeguards and clear controls for personal information especially for converging cross-platform information sharing practices (Haimson, 2018), but our participants no longer believed that the removal or ability to edit past digital footprints were possible. Instead, they

shifted their approach and expectations of how they used social media. As young people become more accepting of their past digital displays, society must adapt to this developing open multi-projection of identities. The need to recognise that singular past identity projections (e.g. traditional media outlets portrayal of a celebrity tweet using inappropriate (potentially insulting) terminology from their pre-fame teenage years) should not be taken out of context especially for individuals with identities that were still less well understood by the general public, such as those who express more fluid identities. Participants shared stories of displaying sexual and gender identities in more nuanced and subtle ways (such as images with a partner) and no longer relied on the features of any given site for such projections.

The findings of the present study highlight how social media plays a critical and overwhelmingly positive role in facilitating LGBTQ+ and particularly queer youths' narrative identity development. All participants recounted some form of positive learning experiences or redemptive meaning-making (McAdams & McLean, 2013). By offering individuals the ability to reconcile and resolve divergent internalised self-concepts and multiple identity descriptors, social media was identified as a key asset for the task of better contextualising (Erickson, 1968; McAdams, 2015; McLean et al., 2018), and disseminating stories of their adolescent and emerging adult LGBTQ+ lived experience which led to highly positive outcomes of a more stable, secure and authentic sense of their projected identity. To best facilitate future healthy psychosocial development of LGBTQ+ youth, social media should not simply be vilified, or its use discouraged indiscriminately.

Limitations

Though attempts were made to recruit inclusively with regards to sexual and gender identities (i.e. focusing on same-sex attracted youth rather than specific sexual/gender labels), the group consisted mainly of white university undergraduates who already openly identified as LGBTQ+. Furthermore, all participants were recruited from one university, which is

renowned for inclusivity, yet the small sample of participants represent just a small proportion of the LGBTQ+ community of this institution. Thus, the positive accounts of social media that are presented in this paper may be limited to well-adjusted LGBTQ+ youth living within a particularly inclusive, safe and accepting environment. Given the diverse nature of LGBTQ+ experiences, and the way in which sexual identity intersects with other aspects of identity (e.g. class, gender, race; Crenshaw, 1989), the experiences reported in our sample are likely different from other LGBTQ+ youth. Importantly, not all LGBTQ+ youth have such positive experiences (DeVito et al., 2018; Haimson, 2018), especially those for whom being LGBTQ+ intersects with other marginalised identities (e.g. low SES, race) and/or live within less supportive offline spaces (Taylor, Falconer, & Snowden, 2014).

Narrative approaches are at least in part retrospective studies which focus on participants re-storying their life, how they make sense of these experiences and how this impacts their identity development over time. As the methods used to collect data are focused on the retelling of past events, stories may change and not accurately represent the events themselves. As our focus is on how participants bring meaning to these life moments to find a secure sense of identity bridging their adolescence and adulthood, this may account for their positive outlook recollecting their teen years. Future research is needed to explore how younger adolescents experience social media and identity development ‘in the moment’, as their responses may differ to those given in retrospect. In particular, younger adolescents who may be less comfortable in their LGBTQ+ identity may be an important group for further study, though accessing such individuals may be difficult.

Conclusion

Participant stories highlight how social media has become a transformative tool for LGBTQ+ youth, and the part social media plays in the reconciliation of nuanced and highly-personalised multifaceted identity configurations, which are adaptive to context and change

over time. Multiple social media platforms were used differentially and often simultaneously to perform differing identity work, particularly during life transitions (Haimson, 2018). Moreover, our research highlights how LGBTQ+ youth, particularly queer female youth, are actively bridging these differing identity projections to take control of their own life stories and make their voice heard (Driver, 2007). By sharing their unique all too often invisible experiences within a world of dominant models of sexual orientation and gender binaries, they reject previous cultural templates which promoted both dominant hetero- and homonormative binary master narratives that do not begin to address the diversity of LGBTQ+ youth lived experiences that are playing out today. By highlighting the safety, autonomy and control afforded contemporary LGBTQ+ youth by the social media environment, we have further contributed to understandings of the process of contemporary youth identity construction, particularly for queer youth and women who have typically been underrepresented in research.

References

- Anderson, M. (2019, June 13). Mobile Technology and Home Broadband 2019. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from <https://www.pewinternet.org/2019/06/13/mobile-technology-and-home-broadband-2019/>
- Arnett, J. J., Žukauskienė, R., & Sugimura, K. (2014). The new life stage of emerging adulthood at ages 18–29 years: Implications for mental health. *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 1, 569-576. doi:10.1016/S2215-0366(14)00080-7
- Baams, L., Jonas, K., Utz, S., Bos, H. & van der Vuurst, L. (2011). Internet use and online social support among same sex attracted individuals of different ages. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 27, 1820-1827. doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2011.04.002
- Bamberg, M. (2006). Stories: Big or small: Why do we care? *Narrative Inquiry*, 16(1), 139-147. doi:10.1075/ni.16.1.18bam

- 902 Bell, B. T. (2016). Understanding adolescents. In L. Little, D. B. Fitton, B. T. Bell, and N.
 903 Toth (Eds.). *Perspectives on HCI research with teenagers* (pp. 11-27). Cham,
 904 Switzerland: Springer International Publishing. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-33450-9_2
- 905 Bivens, R. (2017). The gender binary will not be deprogrammed: Ten years of coding gender
 906 on Facebook. *New Media & Society*, 19, 880–898. doi:10.1177/1461444815621527
- 907 Birnholtz, J., Fitzpatrick, C., Handel, M., & Brubaker, J. R. (2014). Identity, identification
 908 and identifiability: The language of self-presentation on a location-based mobile
 909 dating app. In *Proceeding of the 16th ACM International Conference on Human-*
 910 *Computer Interaction with Mobile Devices and Services* (pp. 3-12). Association for
 911 Computing Machinery, Inc. doi:10.1145/2628363.2628406
- 912 boyd, d. (2011). Social network sites as networked publics: Affordances, dynamics, and
 913 implications. In Z. Papacharissi (Ed.) *A networked self: Identity, community, and*
 914 *culture on social network sites* (pp. 39-58). New York, NY: Routledge.
- 915 boyd, d. (2014). *It's complicated: The social lives of networked teens*. London: Yale
 916 University Press
- 917 Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research*
 918 *in Psychology*, 3, 77-101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- 919 Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019) Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative*
 920 *Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11, 589-597.
 921 doi:10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806
- 922 Bruner, J. (1990). *Acts of meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- 923 Carver, P. R., Egan, S. K., & Perry, D. G. (2004). Children who question their
 924 heterosexuality. *Developmental Psychology*, 40, 43-53. doi:10.1037/0012-
 925 1649.40.1.43

- 926 Cohler, B. J., & Hammack, P. L. (2007). The psychological world of the gay teenager: Social
927 change, narrative, and “normality”. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 36, 46-59.
928 doi:10.1007/s10964-006-9110-1
- 929 Corrington, A., Nitttrouer, C. L., Trump-Steele, R. C. E., & Hebl, M. (2019). Letting him B:
930 A study on the intersection of gender and sexual orientation in the workplace. *Journal*
931 *of Vocational Behavior*, 113, 129-142. doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2018.10.005
- 932 Craig, S. L., & McInroy, L. (2014). You can form a part of yourself online: The influence of
933 new media on identity development and coming out for LGBTQ youth. *Journal of*
934 *Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*, 18, 95-109. doi:10.1080/19359705.2013.777007
- 935 Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist
936 critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics.
937 *University of Chicago Legal Forum*: 1(8), 139-167.
- 938 Davis, K. (2012). Tensions of identity in a networked era: Young people’s perspectives on
939 the risks and rewards of online self-expression. *New Media and Society*, 14, 634-651.
940 doi:10.1177/1461444811422430
- 941 Davis, K. & Weinstein, E. (2017). Identity development in the digital age: An Eriksonian
942 perspective. In M. F. Wright (Ed.), *Identity, sexuality, and relationships among*
943 *emerging adults in the digital age* (pp. 1-17). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.
944 doi:10.4018/978-1-5225-1856-3.ch001
- 945 DeVito, M. A., Walker, A. M., & Birnholtz, J. (2018). 'Too gay for Facebook': Presenting
946 LGBTQ+ identity throughout the personal social media ecosystem. *Human Computer*
947 *Interaction*, 2(44). doi:10.1145/3274313
- 948 Driver, S. (2007). *Queer girls and popular culture: Reading, resisting and creating media*.
949 New York, NY: Peter Lang.

- 950 Duguay, S. (2016). "He has a way gayer Facebook than I do": Investigating sexual identity
 951 disclosure and context collapse on a social networking site. *New Media & Society*, 18,
 952 891-907. doi:10.1177/1461444814549930
- 953 Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity, youth, and crisis*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton.
- 954 Faulkner, S. L., & Hecht, L. H. (2011). The negotiation of closetable identities: A narrative
 955 analysis of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered queer Jewish identity. *Journal of*
 956 *Social and Personal Relationships*, 28, 829-847. doi:10.1177/0265407510391338
- 957 Fox, J., & Ralston, R. (2016). Queer identity online: Informal learning and teaching
 958 experiences of LGBTQ individuals on social media. *Computers in Human Behavior*,
 959 65, 635-642. doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.06.009
- 960 Frank, A. (2000). The standpoint of storyteller. *Qualitative Health Research*, 10, 354-365.
- 961 Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.
- 962 Habermas, T., & Bluck, S. (2000). Getting a life: The development of the life story in
 963 adolescence. *Psychological Bulletin*, 126, 748-769. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.126.5.748
- 964 Haimson, O. L. (2018). Social media as social transition machinery. *Proceedings of the*
 965 *ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*. 2(63). DOI: 10.1145/3274332
- 966 Hammack, P. L., Thompson, E. M. & Pilecki, A. (2009). Configurations of identity among
 967 sexual minority youth: Context, desire, and narrative. *Journal of Youth and*
 968 *Adolescence*. 38, 867-883. doi:10.1007/s10964-008-9342-3
- 969 Heath, J., & Goggin, K. (2009) Attitudes towards male homosexuality, bisexuality, and the
 970 down low lifestyle: Demographic differences and HIV implications. *Journal of*
 971 *Bisexuality*, 9(1), 17-31. doi:10.1080/15299710802659997
- 972 Herek, G. M. (2007). Confronting sexual stigma and prejudice: Theory and practice. *The*
 973 *Journal of Social Issues*, 63, 905-925. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.2007.00544.x

- 974 Hillier, L., & Harrison, L. (2007). Building realities less limited than their own: Young
975 people practicing same-sex attraction on the Internet. *Sexualities*, 10, 82–100.
976 doi:10.1177/1363460707072956
- 977 Hostetler, A. J., & Herdt, G. H. (1998). Culture, sexual lifeways, and developmental
978 subjectivities: Rethinking sexual taxonomies. *Social Research*, 65, 249–290.
- 979 Josselson, R. (2011) Narrative research: Constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing
980 story. In F. J. Wertz, K. Charmaz, L. M. McMullen, R. Josselson, R. Anderson, & E.
981 McSpadden (Eds.). *Five ways of doing qualitative analysis: Phenomenological*
982 *Psychology, Grounded Theory, Discourse Analysis, Narrative Research, and Intuitive*
983 *Inquiry* (pp. 224-240). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- 984 Kuper, L., & Mustanski, B. S. (2014). Using narrative analysis to identify patterns of internet
985 influence on the identity development of same-sex attracted youth. *Journal of*
986 *Adolescent Research*, 29, 499-532. doi:10.1177/0743558414528975
- 987 Lijadi, A. A., & Schalkwyk, G. J. (2017). Place identity constructions of Third Culture Kids:
988 Eliciting voices of children from high mobility lifestyles. *Geoforum*, 81, 120-128.
989 doi:10.1016/j.geoforum.2017.02.015
- 990 Manning, J. (2016). Identity, relationships, and culture: A constitutive model of coming out.
991 In J. Manning & C. Noland (Eds) *Contemporary studies of sexuality &*
992 *communication: Theoretical and applied perspectives*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt
- 993 Mathers, L. A. B., Sumerau, J. E., & Cragun, R. T. (2018). The limits of homonormativity:
994 Constructions of bisexual and transgender People in the post-gay era. *Sociological*
995 *Perspectives*, 61, 934–952. doi:10.1177/0731121417753370
- 996 McAdams, D. P. (2006). *The redemptive self: Stories Americans live by*. New York, NY:
997 Oxford University Press.

- 998 McAdams, D. P. (2008). Personal narratives and the life story. In O. P. John, R. W. Robins,
999 & L. A. Pervin (Eds.), *Handbook of personality: Theory and research* (pp. 242-262).
1000 New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- 1001 McAdams, D. P. (2015). *The art and science of personality development*. New York, NY:
1002 Guilford Press.
- 1003 McAdams, D. P., & McLean, K. C. (2013). Narrative identity. *Current Directions in*
1004 *Psychological Science*, 22, 233-238. doi:10.1177/0963721413475622
- 1005 Mclean, K. C., Lilgendahl, J. P., Fordham, C., Alpert, E., Marsden, E., Szymanski, K., &
1006 McAdams, D. P. (2018) Identity development in cultural context: The role of
1007 deviating from master narratives. *Journal of Personality*, 86, 631-651.
1008 doi:10.1111/jopy.12341
- 1009 McLean, K. C., & Syed, M. (2015). Personal, master, and alternative narratives: An
1010 integrative framework for understanding identity development in context. *Human*
1011 *Development*, 58, 318–349. doi:10.1159/000445817
- 1012 Miller, S. (2015). A queer literacy framework promoting (a)gender and (a)sexuality self-
1013 determination and justice. *The English Journal*, 104(5), 37-44. Retrieved from
1014 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24484578>
- 1015 Mustanski, B., Andrews, R., & Puckett, J. A. (2016). The Effects of cumulative victimization
1016 on mental health among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender adolescents and
1017 young adults. *American Journal of Public Health*, 106, 527-533.
1018 doi:10.2105/AJPH.2015.302976
- 1019 National Center for Transgender Equality. (2018, October 5). Understanding non-binary
1020 people: How to be respectful and supportive. Retrieved from [https://transequality.org/](https://transequality.org/issues/resources/understanding-non-binary-people-how-to-be-respectful-and-supportive)
1021 [issues/resources/understanding-non-binary-people-how-to-be-respectful-and-](https://transequality.org/issues/resources/understanding-non-binary-people-how-to-be-respectful-and-supportive)
1022 [supportive](https://transequality.org/issues/resources/understanding-non-binary-people-how-to-be-respectful-and-supportive)

- 1023 Ofcom. (2018, August 18). *Communications market report*. Retrieved from [https://www.](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0022/117256/CMR-2018-narrative-report.pdf)
- 1024 [ofcom.org.uk/___data/assets/pdf_file/0022/117256/CMR-2018-narrative-report.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0022/117256/CMR-2018-narrative-report.pdf)
- 1025 Office of National Statistics. (2011). *2011 Census: Local characteristics*. Retrieved from
- 1026 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011census/2011censusdata/2011censusdatacatalogue>
- 1027 [/localcharacteristics](https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011census/2011censusdata/2011censusdatacatalogue)
- 1028 Office of National Statistics. (2016). *Statistical bulletin: Sexual identity, UK: 2016*. Retrieved
- 1029 from [https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualidentityuk/2016)
- 1030 [culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualidentityuk/2016](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualidentityuk/2016).
- 1031 Office of National Statistics. (2017). *Social networking by age group, 2011-2017*. Retrieved
- 1032 from [https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristi](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/adhocs/007401socialnetworkingbyagegroup2011to2017)
- 1033 [cs/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/adhocs/007401socialnetworkingbyagegroup201](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/adhocs/007401socialnetworkingbyagegroup2011to2017)
- 1034 [1to2017](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/adhocs/007401socialnetworkingbyagegroup2011to2017)
- 1035 Parent, M. C., Talley, A. E., Schwartz, E. N. & Hancock, D. W. (2015). I want your sex: The
- 1036 role of sexual exploration in fostering positive sexual self-concepts for heterosexual
- 1037 and sexual minority women. *Psychology of Sex Orientation and Gender Diversity*, 2,
- 1038 199–204. doi:10.1037/sgd0000097
- 1039 Pasupathi, M., Mansour, E., & Brubaker, J. R. (2007). Developing a life story: Constructing
- 1040 relations between self and experience in autobiographical narratives. *Human*
- 1041 *Development*, 50, 85–110. doi:10.1159/000100939
- 1042 Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd Ed.). Thousand Oaks,
- 1043 CA: Sage.
- 1044 Pearson, J., & Wilkinson, L. (2013). Family relationships and adolescent well-being: Are
- 1045 families equally protective for same-sex attracted youth? *Journal of Youth and*
- 1046 *Adolescence*, 42, 376-393. doi:10.1007/s10964-012-9865-5

- 1047 Perrin, A., & Anderson, M. (2019, April 10). Share of U.S. adults using social media,
 1048 including Facebook, is mostly unchanged since 2018. Retrieved from
 1049 [https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/10/share-of-u-s-adults-using-social-](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/10/share-of-u-s-adults-using-social-media-including-facebook-is-mostly-unchanged-since-2018/)
 1050 [media-including-facebook-is-mostly-unchanged-since-2018/](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/10/share-of-u-s-adults-using-social-media-including-facebook-is-mostly-unchanged-since-2018/)
- 1051 Polkinghorne, D. (1988). *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. Albany, NY: State
 1052 University of New York.
- 1053 Raley, A. B., & Lucas, J. L. (2006). Stereotypes or success? Prime-time television
 1054 portrayals of gay male, lesbian, and bisexual characters. *Journal of*
 1055 *Homosexuality*, 51(2), 19–38. doi:10.1300/J082v51n02_02
- 1056 Randazzo, R., Farmer, K., & Lamb, S. (2015). Queer women’s perspectives on sexualization
 1057 of women in media. *Journal of Bisexuality*, 15(1), 99–129.
 1058 doi:10.1080/15299716.2014.986315
- 1059 Ricoeur, P. (1984). *Time and narrative: Vol. 3* (K. McLaughlin & D. Pellauer Trans.).
 1060 Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. (Original work published 1983)
- 1061 Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative analysis*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- 1062 Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA:
 1063 Sage.
- 1064 Safranova, V. (2015, November 18). On fake Instagram, a chance to be real. *The New York*
 1065 *Times*. Retrieved from [https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/19/fashion/instagram-](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/19/fashion/instagram-finstagram-fake-account.html)
 1066 [finstagram-fake-account.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/19/fashion/instagram-finstagram-fake-account.html)
- 1067 Sarbin, T. R. (1986). *Narrative psychology: The storied nature of human conduct*. New York,
 1068 NY: Praeger.
- 1069 Savin-Williams, R. C. (2005). *The new gay teenager*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University
 1070 Press.

- 1071 Schachter, E. P. (2004). Identity configurations: A new perspective on identity formation in
1072 contemporary society. *Journal of Personality*, 72, 167–199. doi:10.1111/j.0022-
1073 3506.2004.00260.x
- 1074 Solomon, D., McAbee, J., Asberg, K., & McGee, A. (2015). Coming out and the potential for
1075 growth in sexual minorities: The role of social reactions and internalized
1076 homonegativity. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 62, 1512-1538.
1077 doi:10.1080/00918369.2015.1073032
- 1078 Stonewall. (2018, January). The full list: Top 100 employers 2018. Retrieved from
1079 <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/full-list-top-100-employers-2018>
- 1080 Suler, J. (2004). The online disinhibition effect. *CyberPsychology & Behaviour*, 7(3), 321-
1081 326. doi:10.1089/1094931041291295
- 1082 Taylor, Y., Falconer, E., & Snowden, R. (2014). Queer youth, Facebook and faith: Facebook
1083 methodologies and online identities. *New Media and Society*, 16, 1138-1158.
1084 doi:10.1177/146144481544000
- 1085 Tolman, D. L., & McClelland, S. I. (2011). Normative sexuality development in adolescence:
1086 A decade in review, 2000-2009. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 21, 242-255.
1087 doi:10.1111/j.1532-7795.2010.00726.x
- 1088 Turner, A. (2015). Generation Z: Technology and social interest. *Journal of Individual*
1089 *Psychology*, 71(2), 103–113. doi:10.1353/jip.2015.0021
- 1090 Weststrate, N. M., & McLean, K. C. (2010). The rise and fall of gay: A cultural-historical
1091 approach to gay identity development. *Memory*, 18, 225-240.
1092 doi:10.1080/09658210903153923
- 1093 York St John University. (2018). Equality Data: Students. Retrieved from
1094 <https://www.yorks.ac.uk/equality/equality-data/equality-data-students/>