

Introduction

This thesis explores Social Networking sites as a medium of expression for sexual identity construction; more specifically the research question aimed to explore how gay and lesbian individuals use social networking websites as a means to construct and explore their sexual identities through self presentation on conventional social networking sites (SNS) available and used by everybody versus LGB SNS which are primarily used by Lesbian/Gay and Bisexual individuals and groups.

Through the conduction of eight semi- structured interviews with an even number of four males and females and a content analysis of each participant's social networking profiles, the research explored how sexual identities were presented and played out on these sites by the variation and degree of information that was disclosed by the sample study.

Overall the aim was to explore the advantages and disadvantages social networking entails for the gay community through a comparison of both types of SNS, exploring how self presentation and sexual identities are negotiated and managed through the two while determining if these sites were in fact a safe location to play out sexual identities if they are a site of identity restrictions.

From research up to this point it has struck me that there is limited research concerned with the disadvantages of social networking and identity experimentation for gays and lesbians.

Thus this present study aims to acquire if gay individuals feel they can perform their sexual identities more comfortably and honest in one ahead of the other or if they feel the need to 'conceal' their sexual identities on certain social network sites which are accessible to all e.g. Facebook and reasons why.

The basis of this study is to get both sides of the story, addressing the positives but also taking into account the negatives and weighting up which SNS is less restrictive on sexual

identity construction. Self presentation will be a dominant theme in drawing research, extending on the existing research exploring the differences of presentation between the two sites.

Chapter 1

Literature

Identity construction and self presentation are two concepts that continue to fascinate contemporary sociologists and students of the discipline alike. Goffman writing in the 1950s wrote intensively on the concept of identity and impression management with theories that stood the test of time and are as relevant as ever today. Once cyberspace and internet relations are thrown into the mix, things get even more interesting. As society progresses, so too does technology and as a result we as ‘social actors’ are provided with an ever expanding arena to explore and play out our identities.

To explore how LGB identified individuals navigate through social network sites and construct sexual identity, we must look at a number of different components, in particular how they navigate through real life and manage their sexuality offline, which we can then apply to the online navigation of Social Network sites. The purpose of social networking must be considered and how they serve as a stage for identity construction through forms of self presentation, along with what they offer LGB identities.

Cyberspace has opened up a brand new chapter in self presentation. Through online textual descriptions we choose how we present ourselves and ultimately choosing which aspects of our identity we wish to share or conceal, such as our gender or race. It provides a space where one can “try on” new identities, explore characteristics that intrigue us, and become members of groups we never would in the ‘real world’.

Regarding sexuality exploration, social networking sites have received praise as an environment for positive LGB identity construction. Most contemporary research and empirical data all points to the advantages that social networking entails for lesbian and gay

individuals. Literature on the topic (Turkle, 1999; Copper et al, 2000; Donald et al, 2000) suggests social networking provides a safe and anonymous medium where LGB people who may be 'in the closet' or 'passing' in real life can be themselves and interact with other members shielded from discrimination, stigmatization and prejudice that often is attached to being a member of a minority group.

However current literature, in particular Grasmuck et al. (2009) has begun to look towards mainstream social networking sites as opposed to sites strictly designated to cater for particular identity aspects such as strictly LGB sites, finding that when there is a more public audience, and public access by friends, that self presentation may differ.

Thus it is with this knowledge of literature I begin to challenge the current state of play and seek to determine if mainstream social networking sites have the same aspects of sexual identity construction for LGB people or if they reinforce offline behaviour of members of the LGB community,

Identity Management

To provide a theoretical framework and drawing upon the symbolic interactionism approach; Goffman (1959) examines the techniques used by social actors to perform social roles. To him, we are all merely actors on the world stage and adopt suitable roles to fit in with a particular audience. Goffman uses this dramaturgy image as a way of viewing the world and understanding how humans present themselves in interactions with others. To Goffman, the roles we play must fit the audience's expectations and we as spectators are asked to take seriously the impression we see.

As we are all putting on a performance and judged upon this, Impression Management is our way to control the perceptions others have of us. When we present ourselves to others, Goffman argues that we usually have an objective, that we are concerned with controlling others responses to our self presentation: "I assume that when an individual appears before others he will have many motives for trying to control the impression they receive of the situation" (Goffman, 1959:15). Giving off a good impression to the right audience is vital and it's important we maintain this. The performance nature of our identity seeks to enact positive images of ourselves to others (Grasmuck et al. 2009).

For lesbians and gays the option to reveal their sexuality to an audience presents challenges in everyday life and can often result in secrecy. This stems from the ever present possibility of stigmatization, discredibility and the notion that a homosexual identity will be defined by straight audiences as different (Ponse, 1976) or deviant and often stigmatised. In ways to control this, members of the LGB community employ strategies to manage this aspect of their identity such as 'passing' and often these strategies are used differently with different audiences.

'Passing' means "the successful accomplishment in social interaction of a usual, unremarkable social identity by an individual, who would if discovered, be deemed unusual or different in some crucial way" (Ponse, 1976:238). For LGB people this entails passing as a straight identity among straight persons using strategies such as impression management. Goffman (1963:2) distinguishes between *virtual* social identity which is the self that audiences expect to see and actual social identity which is the real self. In this analysis virtual identity refers to the straight mask presented to some audiences by the gay actor while actual identity refers to the gay self (Ponse, 1976).

Offline this may not be a challenge as sexuality does not take physical form, but if in passing one must be aware always of the audience and maintenance of activity. The need for passing may be perceived as more or less urgent with respect to particular audiences of friends or acquaintances, for example, the working environment is a setting where sexuality can be restrained (Ponse, 1976). Thus in exploring social networking sites this element of passing which is very easily adapted online, can come under threat depending on what type of social network site is used and who has access to the profile page.

Online Identity

Once upon a time our only chance to for a first impression or social interaction was based upon face to face impressions. Since the introduction of the Internet however, websites like chat rooms, dating sites and the focus of this study, social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace have all provided a new and exciting opportunity (Livingstone, 2008) for one to determine how to present themselves to others.

We manage our impression and aspects of our identity in multiple ways and this aspect of choosing and controlling our impression is the fundamental feature of social networking sites. Social networking sites allow us to choose and perform different aspects of our identity or in

the case of LGB people, can allow for easy passing. Goffman's theatrical metaphor provides an insight to understanding how individuals in certain circumstances "consciously and unconsciously" perform their sexual identity to others (Valentine, 1992:241) which can be applied in this present study to relate to SNS.

Social networking sites such as Facebook and My Space have attracted millions of users over recent years and popularity of their usage continues to grow. Livingstone (2008) points out they promote a "narcissistic fascination with self-display" (p.393) and "for many, creating and networking online is becoming an integral means of managing ones identity, lifestyle and social relations" (p.394). Some sites cater to diverse audiences, while others attract individuals based on shared experiences or shared identities such as race, religion and sexuality (Boyd and Ellison, 2008).

O'Connor and MacKeogh (2007) explore the possibility of developing and sustaining a sense of community in a virtual world minus regular face to face interaction concluding that female members of an online discussion board felt empowered and used the site as a space for bonding, which is similar to the concept of SNS, where people with shared identity such as sexuality may feel a greater sense of togetherness.

A Social network site can be defined as "web based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and transverse their list of connections and those made within the system" (Boyd and Ellison, 2008:211).

Goffman formulates a distinction of where our performances take place- front stage (where the performance takes place and an audience is present) and back stage (where one can practice the performance without the eyes of the audience) and Guerrero, Anderson and Affifi

(2007) point how Facebook pictures and profile content are usually selected privately without an audience but are presented and viewed front stage.

This too can be applied to sexuality online. Our online composition can vary with regards to the type of social networking site we use and regards to the people we interact with.

Valentine (1992), like Ponse (1976) found that at different times and different places such as work, lesbians and gay men are forced to decide “if, how and when to disclose their sexuality” (p.237). Online then, we may decide to conceal our sexuality (like ‘passing’ in real life) on a mainstream website but expose our sexual identity on a site fundamentally devoted to sexual minority groups.

It is this aspect of identity multiplicity and flexibility that Turkle (1999) focuses on. Online we can create fake identities through textual description. From these descriptions we are left to our own devices to draw our own conclusions based on what we are presented with, for example if their ‘interested in’ field is left blank, we may question their sexual preference (Baker and Moore, 2007).

Because the text is written, and we control what is disclosed, we have time to reflect and edit our composition, perhaps providing a better ability to manage our identity which may not be possible offline. Turkle, similar to Goffman and Valentine provides a more modern insight in particular one of identity in cyberspace.

This multiplicity element of social networking allows for identity play and is considered as one of the many advantages of social networking as it helps expose how sexual identities are constructed thus will be explored and compared with current findings of this study.

Anonymity and belonging

Copper et al. (2000) discusses online sexuality as whole exploring a wide range of topics such as internet relationships, sexual information and in regard to relevance of this present study, alternative communities and disenfranchised people. Looking at the advantages, the authors explain how the internet has allowed gay minorities become majorities in their own virtual communities and made it accessible for them to communicate, network and experiment away from prejudice and discrimination.

This of course if one of the major benefits of the internet on sexual identity building, people who have a hard time meeting others have a better chance of meeting compatible people online, but it disregards public virtual communities such as social networking sites and focuses primarily on confidential gay dating services.

Donald et al. (1998) address the advantages of electronic networking in the lesbian and gay community, with the greatest advantage again being the fact that gays and lesbians from rural areas can interact with online with anonymity. This notion of online anonymity allows users to mask aspects of their identity (O'Connor, B. & C. MacKeogh, 2007) including sexuality.

McKenna and Bargh (1998) concerned with stigmatized identities and online newsgroups, found that in participating in an internet group sharing a marginalized aspect of one's identity led to a transformation of an individual's social identity offline, which in turn increased self acceptance. As users found the marginalized newsgroups an increasing importance to their identity they began to "feel this aspect of themselves is more socially acceptable than they had thought" (p.692).

This might be the case in this current research, when exploring LGB SNS, however it is quite dated (1998), the mean age of the sample is 37years and there is a big difference in

newsgroups and SNS. Again this study focuses on online environments for particular stigmatized identity groups, not inclusive of all.

Although these findings are important to consider and will be explored and compared against findings of this present study, they are sites for a particular audience, thus my interest is in exploring how self presentation and identity construction compares to mainstream and more mainstream sites?

Grasmuck et al. (2009) explores differences in self presentation by ethno racial groups, examining identity construction on Facebook “a nonymous online environment that is less limiting than internet dating sites” (p.161) as the authors found much of the past research on racial identity production, and as I found to be the equivalent with sexuality, “has treated the online environment mostly as a disembodied and anonymous environment” (ibid).

The findings of this research concluded that ethno racial groups, previously marginalized in earlier days of the internet are well articulated, elaborated and “putting themselves out there” on Facebook. In my own research I hope to achieve a similar outcome and determine if this too is the case for sexuality, if it downplayed or asserted on a more nonymous site versus an anonymous LGB site.

Grasmuck et al. (2009) discuss how Facebook is an ideal condition for exploring identity as it allows users to specify many dimensions of their identity, including sexuality (“interested in” is an included profile feature). What differentiates Facebook from other online communities is that members primarily communicate with people who are already part of their extended network (Boyd and Ellison, 2008), “local contacts with stronger ties centred on pre-existing study or work contexts” (Livingstone, 2008: 395) and are usually looking for romance and friendship among people they already know (Grasmuck et al. 2009).

An interesting question posed by Grasmuck et al. which relates directly to this current study was that given the fact Facebook is nonymous, and users can potentially have their claims challenged offline, how realistic are Facebook claims. E.g. how realistic is the information disclosed. Therefore my interest raises the question, is one more inclined to reveal or conceal their sexuality from people they know if online experiences can have offline consequences? As with offline challenges of 'passing', who do we select to reveal our sexuality to?

On LGB SNS, where all the members have a shared characteristic, being their homosexuality, there is a lesser fear of homophobic behaviour or judgemental attitudes which are attached sadly, to members of minority groups in society. Therefore for this study I found it important to consider conflicting identities and in trying to grasp why different information is disclosed on different sites.

Although many LGB people may be content with having two separate spaces for identity exploration, and which may very well be the case when interviewing my sample, I can't help but feel there is a reason behind why LGB identified people navigate through social networking sites differently, depending on the audience, as with offline in passing.

Reinforcement of homophobic behaviour?

Livingstone (2008) indicates creating identity and social relations online is not only time intensive and on occasion risky, but can be difficult to manage. Online risks may arise from individuals willing, sometimes naive self display of personal information to a wide circle of contacts. As well as from the possibility of being neglected or excluded: "Deciding what not to say about oneself online is for many an agentic act to protect their identity and their spaces of intimacy" (P.409).

Given the extent of homophobic behaviour offline, it is no wonder why many LGB people would consider creating identity online as risky, and with the options of multiple identities at the click of mouse, indeed difficult to manage. Although the scale of this study is not to examine bullying or even the extent of homophobic behaviour witnessed by my sample it is important to recognise the severity of this behaviour on an individual and to understand why one would want to adopt other or hide aspects of identities. More recently, there is a worry that this is creeping into Social Networking sites.

Swaine (2011) for the Irish Independent reports of a teenager found dead, having committed suicide after torment and online bullying because of his sexuality. Anonymous abusive messages were left under Jamey Rodemyer's posts on social networking site Formspring which is a mainstream site. The youth wrote of his unhappiness and spoke of suicide on his blog.

What's interesting to note is that Jamey was openly gay and his parents provided full support. What struck me was the torment he received from strangers online was enough to drive him to suicide thus prompting how seriously we take our online audience. Thus I ask, because of certain online behaviour and comments from others on mainstream SNS, do traditionally marginalised groups in particular homosexuals feel they must conceal certain aspects of identity as they would in offline environment to maintain a peaceful and safe living?

As mentioned, the majority of current research on sexual identities and social networking tend to favour the advantages of multiple identity play, anonymity and easy passing, which evidently cannot be dismissed. Offline, managing aspects of identity have proven to be difficult for many so given the option for an environment where identity in particular, sexual identity can be controlled.

However I have found there to be a lack of research that explores the disadvantages of social networking for lesbian and gay identities and all research tends to deal exclusively with LGB social networking sites. Grasmuck et al. (2009) exploring ethno racial groups found that identity altered between mainstream SNS and SNS that strictly required membership of a racial group.

It is my belief therefore, that this is similar to sexuality online. Based on lack of research, it is my theory that mainstream social network sites might actually recreate homophobia online, resulting in many LGB individuals expressing closeted behaviour and expressions and in turn reinforcing homophobia in real life.

Goffman discusses the importance of our audience and how we constantly seek approval of others. Our SNS profiles reflect this, everything we write about ourselves is for others to see and for this research I attempt to determine if, how and why LBG people choose to conceal or disclose their sexuality on mainstream SNS versus LGB SNS.

To my knowledge, no sociological comparisons between the two for identity construction have been made. This current research is an attempt to build on the foundations laid down by Goffman in the 1950s, exploring and managing identity, but like Turkle and Grasmuck, in a more modern society, applying it to sexual identity and to an online setting.

To do so, a series of semi structured face to face interviews supported by content analysis of each interviewee social networking pages, will be carried out with self identified gay and lesbian individuals.

Conclusions will be limited due to the small sample number and the results will not be generalizable to the larger gay population.

Chapter 2: Methodology

1. Selecting the Research Method

As the purpose of this study was of an explanatory and exploratory nature I felt the most appropriate method of research for this particular topic was qualitative. My main objective was to gather data from LGB identified individuals on social networking sites, in particular information about identity and impression management between mainstream social networking sites and LGB (Lesbian, Gay, Bi) social network sites (SNS).

The required data and sample was very specific, in short I needed to collect data that provided an insight to how LGB people navigate through SNS, information disclosed on personal profiles and reasons as to why certain information was or was not included on the page, and of course this required LGB individuals with regular access and knowledge of computers and the internet.

Specifically, data was collected through the conduction of eight semi-structured, intensive, face to face interviews with open ended questions, collected through a recording device on a laptop. This data was then supported with a brief content analysis of the each of the participant's social networking profiles in which I examined the degree of information disclosed and made a comparison between the two sites when available.

According to Schutt (2009) qualitative methods “emphasize observations about natural behaviour...capture social life as it is experienced by the participants rather than in categories predetermined by the researcher” (p.315) and furthermore, defines intensive interviewing as “a method that involves open-ended, relatively unstructured questioning in which the interviewer seeks in-depth information on the interviewees feeling, experience and perceptions” (ibid).

Thus, requiring in depth information on impression management and experiences of the natural behaviour of using social networking sites, interviewing proved to provide a more in depth analysis and gave room for the sample to share opinions and voice their outlook on the research questions, as opposed to quantitative methods. The option to choose interviewing as the research method proved to be the most efficient form of data collection.

Quantitative methods, for this project, were never an option as I found them to be much too constraining for this research. Although surveys are versatile and efficient, allowing for data collection from a large group of people in a short time period, it was not suitable for this research which required explanations and exploratory questions, surveys predominantly use predetermined answers in data collection. Perhaps my questions could have been adapted to suit a survey layout; however the findings would have been limited to yes or no style answers with little room for explanations and as the questions are set, no room for sub questions stemming from something that may have been said.

Regarding qualitative methods, participant observation was not adequate. Schutt (2009) indicates that participant observation is a method for gathering data that “involves developing a sustained relationship with people while they go about their normal activities” (p.315). It was not enough to simply observe my sample navigating through social networking sites, undisturbed and draw up findings from this.

Although it would have allowed the chance to see firsthand how my sample navigates through social networking sites, I considered it intrusive of privacy. This method I suspected, before beginning research, would also prove time restrictive. Instead I opted for a content analysis of each Facebook page before each interview.

Initially I had considered conducting a focus group, as it would have been time efficient and allowed for much discussion. I also considered that my sample of LGB people would feel

more comfortable and as a result more honest when in a group of shared similarities, however drawing a sample of 8-10 people and attempting to round them all up together on the same day and time proved much difficult as I had problems in general with drawing a sample.

Finally I stuck to interviewing. I found it to be the most appropriate method and successful. It was accessible and simple to conduct once a sample was obtained and as I had access to gay individuals in my own social networks it provided a good starting point.

The benefits of this method overshadowed the disadvantages immensely. Firstly I found it to have a less formal feel, and more or less like a conversation with my sample which had impact on the reliability, as no volunteer refused to show their SNS pages. Timing was not much of an issue, as after finding suitable respondents, a time, day and place was negotiated to suit both parties.

Face to face interviews gave way to a change of direction in interviewing and felt much more personal. I feel that results and validity would have altered greatly through telephone or email interviews, as I got to know every interviewee before conducting an interview interacting by engaging in some general 'chit chat' before getting straight into the interview which is why I suspect no participant had problems showing their pages.

There were a number of limitations that could have potentially affected validity and reliability. Current findings seem substantial but I cannot speak on behalf of my respondents or determine how honest the provided data is. Because of the small sample and type of sampling (see section 2) the findings cannot be generalizable to the larger gay population.

Limitations were not exclusive to the method, but to the overall study design. Firstly I needed a sample from a gay population (see section 2) and respondents with regular access and

knowledge of computers and the internet. I also needed access to the internet and a computer for every interview carried out. Entering the field as a straight female, interviewing LGB individuals, there was a chance this could spoil the field and affect the validity of results.

2. Deciding on Sample used

Because my research question explored a particular group in society my sample needed be very specific. I needed to speak to members of the LGB community, who regularly used a conventional social network site and a LGB SNS and of course, that were voluntary willing to share information and allow analysis of their profiles.

My sample selection did not go accordingly to plan, but in all turned out successful. As a starting point I decided on purposive sampling where “each sample element is selected for a purpose, usually because of the unique position of the sample elements” (Schutt, 2009:173) in this case, sexuality. Initially I had intended on using this sample method throughout my research, drawing my LGB sample from two locations providing a broad variation of sexes and ages.

The first intended location to draw a sample from was the Outhouse centre in Dublin (which according to the website is a community and resource centre for LGBT people, their families and friends based in central Dublin. Its primary goal is to offer a safe space for people to inform, meet organize and make things happen) after a recommendation from my supervisor. However after contacting via email requesting volunteers and outlining my objectives, I received a reply with encouragement to post advertisements on websites and in the centre (See Appendix 1). Giving the time frame, advertising was not an ideal option. Also with the location of the centre being Dublin, it would have proven time consuming and costly.

The second location was here in NUIM- the LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans and Questioning) Society. Initially I had thought it would be ideal and accessible, but having been involved with some of the activities of the society from the previous year, and having direct contact to the groups Facebook page, I was aware that many other students completing dissertation projects which concerned identity and sexuality, were too turning to this population to draw a sample.

Thus it was my concern entering this field, that if members were involved in other research projects, they would feel less inclined to engage in further projects, or would participate half-heartedly which in turn would have an effect on the validity and reliability of the data. Not wanting to make anybody feel like they were a source of study or different, I feared with the constant stream of requests for participants from the LGBTQ Society that they would feel like they were being “constantly studied”.

Instead my option was to begin with purposive sampling but move onto snowball sampling, which Schutt (2009) states is “a method of sampling in which sample elements are selected as they are identified by successive informants or interviewees” (p.174). To begin I turned to three self identified gay friends who in turn referred me on to partners and gay friends who were willing to participate. In one case a male presented himself after hearing about the research and offered to take part along with a friend.

This sampling method proved successful and reliable and once a volunteer was recruited, arrangements for the interview were made to accommodate both parties (Interviewer and Interviewee). I was lucky that all participants were easy accessible, within my social network, being either in my home community or in NUIM, which was suitable for the time period and on costs. Being friends with some of the sample, there was a fear that the validity of results would be tainted or biased as they may have held back on some information to avoid

embarrassment or even over exaggerated answers in order to accommodate the research questions.

3. Ethical Considerations

Because the research required finding out a significant deal of personal information and access to personal profiles, a number of ethical issues were considered. Firstly every interviewee was made fully aware of the research and required data.

It was expressed that there would be no physical or psychological harm in participating and it would be non-exploitative. I explained that the interviews were completely confidential and no one would have access to the transcript other than myself and my supervisor. Every participant was made fully aware that everything said in the interview must be recorded; no one was deceived in way.

Voluntary participation was expressed and everyone was well aware that there was no obligation to take part before granting full consent. Once gained, privacy was a major concern. All identities were sealed and a pseudonym was used throughout, granting complete anonymity.

All interviews were carried out and saved on a personal password protected laptop, and all file names were coded in case of theft. Further protecting privacy and safety; all interviews were carried out in safe spaces (See section 3) with just the interviewer and interviewee present, and questions were asked only once approval was granted from my supervisor.

4. Carrying out the Research

After weighting up the research options available, deciding, choosing a sample method and considering a professional code of ethics, it was now time to undertake the actual research. The first step was to compile the interview guide which consisted of 3 sections: mainstream SNS, LGB SNS and comparisons (See Appendix 2) which were then ethically approved by my supervisor.

My first participant was based in my home community. I chose him as he was accessible, openly gay and as a friend, felt he would not refuse me. Interviewing a friend first was not by accident. I chose him almost as a practice run, to test reliability of the method and to adjust further questions if need be. As I did not know some of the other participants I knew I couldn't request second or third meetings, so by interviewing a friend first who did not mind giving up his time, ensured I got the interviews just right before interviewing others.

Once explaining my research he happily agreed to take part. A day and time was adjusted to suit both and the interview took place in his car, which he chose as he did not feel comfortable discussing the topic in a house with his family or mine or in a location where he would be heard by others. Because I was using my laptop as a recording device this was no problem as it was easily portable.

The majority of interviews of people in my home community, known to me and referred as partners by the participants took place in their homes, by their choice as this is where they felt most comfortable and safe. This was no problem for me as my hometown is very small! For those based around the university a room was booked for each interview above the SU, available to students to hold meetings and interviews etc. The room was booked for an hour and a half each time, to allow time before and after the interview to talk.

Before each interview every participant showed me their SNS pages, every participant used and showed me their Facebook profiles and not all the respondents used LGB site. From this I ask questions on things such as relationship status, groups and pages they liked and again on the LGB sites, information they disclosed about themselves.

Rather than asking standard questions in a fixed order, I began with questions from my interview guide, and then allowed for open ended questions which varied across each interview based on what was found on profile pages, and allowing my respondents to answer questions in their own words (Schutt, 2009). All interviews were recorded through a voice recording app on my laptop and saved under file names which did not contain any real names.

To organize the data I created individual files on my laptop for each participant, which included the transcripts and recording of the interview. On deciding what to include a copy of each transcript was printed off and coded, pairing similarities across all participants.

Deciding what to include in the findings was difficult, however to narrow it down I created profiles for each participant, which contained the sites they used, information disclosed and other relevant information (see Appendix 3) so the reader can refer to this information as well as the main findings. Remarks and comments that I found be adequate were included and the points which were repeated across all interviews were noted.

Chapter 3

Analysis of Results and conclusion

The aim of this research was to examine how gay, lesbian and bi-sexual identified people navigate through both mainstream and LGB social networking sites; with the research question asking *how do mainstream Social Networking Sites provide an environment for Sexual Identity Construction compared to LGB Social network websites?*

Overall the objective was to try and determine if social network sites provide an ideal arena to explore sexual identities, as research (Copper et al., 2000; Donald et al., 1998; O Connor and Mac Keogh, 2007; McKenna and Bargh, 1998) previously indicated, or if they were in fact a place that further led to identity restrictions encouraging people to pass as straight or other forms of closeted behaviour to prevent reinforcing homophobic behaviour offline.

Primarily concerned with Goffman's (1959) concept of impression management and how one composes their identity online, this research explored the advantages and disadvantages of social networking sites in relation to how one manages their sexuality on each site and the offline consequences of the information being revealed or concealed. Data found that this concept of identity management played a major role in determining what information one chose to be made public on their social network profile page and required careful editing.

Focusing on sexual identities, the research found reluctance within the sample in disclosing their homosexuality thus this led to a careful monitoring of all outputs and inputs on their profiles fearing a prompt that would reveal their sexuality to their online audience. Along with the careful management of identity on Facebook, participants within the study too managed their LGB profiles, even though these are targeted at specific LGB audiences.

Stemming from the fear that LGB SNS have been increasingly viewed by a wider audience as hyper sexualised due to how some people choose to use them.

Before conducting research the aim was to remain completely reflexive however there was a partial sense of bias relating to the nature of the topic. Previous research indicated the world of social networking opened new opportunities for developing a sense of community in a virtual world (O Connor and MacKeogh, 2007) and allowed for identity multiplicity and flexibility (Turkle, 1999) indicating this was a major benefit for LGB identified people who could interact online with anonymity.

However, based on recent media events such as the large rate of suicides linked to homophobic bullying occurring on and offline which in turn prompted the LGBT “It Gets Better” worldwide internet campaign I couldn’t help but feel that things have changed and sociology has failed to pick up on this. Social networking sites which have grown in popularity and as a result an expansion in users are no longer an exclusive club, changing the nature of how they are used. There is now a larger audience watching and different layers of relationships one must cater to.

Findings were consistent with my predictions, proving that within my sample (which is not generalizable to the larger gay population due to the small scale study and sampling method used) the nature of social networking for LGB identified people has changed, and perhaps is not as beneficial for identity construction and exploration as we would believe. SNS have simply become an expansion of the offline world where closeted behaviour and passing dominates the LGB community, which leads to the question why is there no ‘gay Facebook’ or adequate social networking sites for LGB people.

All the participants of the study used Facebook as their main social network. Not all participants used LGB social network sites but the most popular one within this study was Gaydar.ie for the males, and females citing After Ellen, Gay Community News (GCN) and Queer.ie as some of the sites used.

Impression Management on Facebook

One of the major themes running through the data was the extent of impression and identity management going on within the sample on Facebook relating to sexuality and the reluctance to disclose it on this mainstream SNS. All but one interviewee claimed they consciously managed the information regarding their sexuality on their Facebook pages.

Facebook provides an option to state sexual preference: “interested in” where the user states the preferred sex and relationship status with a feature that states with whom, providing a link to the page of your partner. These two features of Facebook evidently challenged the participants to maintain careful presentation of self as only two participants out of the whole sample stated their sexual preference on Facebook.

Teresa*, a 22 year old final year student is relatively new to the gay community stating she has been out only for the past 8 months. Currently she is in a relationship which has only recently been disclosed on her page, despite its ongoing for the past few months. Although this being public on her page, she still does not state her interest in women: “I just never thought to change it I suppose, but I wouldn’t put up it up. Not that I’m ashamed of who I am, but like I just put in the relationship with Joan* and that’s enough I think”

Because of her ‘new’ sexual orientation perhaps Teresa’s reluctance to state her sexuality on Facebook stems from the different layers of relationships Facebook encompasses. Open to her friends and family in ‘real life’, this doesn’t account for her wider Facebook social group online including school peers and distant relatives who would have associated her with being straight, having male partners in the past.

Often many females, of a younger population would claim on their Facebook profiles to be in a relationship or even married to another female, to establish a close friendship or as a joke.

To Teresa's wider social circle that are not aware of her sexuality directly, perhaps leaving her sexual orientation blank subconsciously leads others to believe she is heterosexual and not actually in a homosexual relationship.

John*, 30, student and part time shop assistant has just ended a four year relationship and for the duration of this time, stated he was in a relationship on his page but did not reveal with who:

Well yeah, I've put in a relationship but haven't put with men, 'cause maybe that's just... I don't know why I do that, maybe it 'cause I think everyone would assume I'm with a woman. I don't know. Like I didn't specifically put with a man which I could have, but I didn't leave it blank either.

Distinguishing that the information wasn't specifically hidden, may indicate that John was shielding his partners identity from family and friends which many straight people would also do for different reasons, however John claims to be openly gay to his inner social circle for the past five or six years, with his family and friends familiar with his ex-partner.

Furthermore John does not state his sexual preference on his Facebook profile:

I just thought, say, the people from work or people I wouldn't know that well and wouldn't want to know everything about me. If they went onto that they'd be like... "Ohh Jesus I didn't know that". That's it really why, I didn't want people from work to know, that's why I didn't put it up and I didn't want to have to not accept people and then go change that so I just left it blank and let them assume what they want to assume.

Shielding both his sexual orientation and relationship demonstrates that John is consciously managing his sexual identity online and again this can be related back to his wider social circle of friends on Facebook, in particular work acquaintances, rather than not accept them to his profile John prefers to let them view it while making up their own minds about him, perhaps leading us to believe he isn't too concerned about offline consequences, despite the particular editing of his online composition.

This is shared also by Cathal*, 22, a retail manager who has only been open about his sexuality to his immediate family and friends for the past two years. He does not state his interest in men, choosing to leave it blank:

I don't to be honest, its left blank, because my brother is gay and I always look at his Facebook and cringe, when I see he has things up like interested in men, and constantly adding other men and I'm just like what are you at and what are you posting that for?! So I just keep mine blank, I like the whole guessing and letting people wonder.

Cathal confirms directly why he chooses to leave his orientation blank and although single at the minute, Cathal indicates he would be reluctant to state his relationship status if it were to change in the immediate future:

I'd remove it completely from my page because I wouldn't like people coming up to me on a day to day basis asking who I'm in a relationship with, ya know, who's this new guy? Maybe in years to come when I'm a bit more comfortable with it myself but definitely not now.

The length of time his sexuality has been publically known offline plays a substantial role in Cathal's presentation of self online. Relating back to the comment made about his brother, perhaps Cathal's reluctance is prompted from hearing or seeing negative comments regarding his brother's openness, seeing this first hand and as he had not been out for a sustainable length of time, he fears that disclosing his sexuality would gather the same response.

In contrast Gerard*, a 22 year old retail assistant who has been openly gay much longer, for four years does not reveal his sexuality on Facebook: "Well yeah, I don't have my sexuality up on it, so yeah I'm not open about it, whether I'm interested in men or females" and Rose*, 22 a student who does have her interest public states it was not always the way: "Yeah, I didn't have it up the first time I joined" and it still continues to change:

I do at the moment it changed back and forth, like I've been out 4 years so everyone knows, it's not like a big deal. It went back and forth for the past year but for the past few months or so it's been like that.

Although claiming that her sexuality is “no big deal” and Gerard seemingly confident in his sexuality (“it’s irrelevant to my social life so I don’t see the point in putting it up”) there is still a level of secrecy and closeted behaviour as both previously claimed to using Facebook everyday on a very regular basis with access on their mobiles, thus to claim his Facebook has no relevance to his social life contradicts Gerard’s motive for not disclosing his sexuality, as Facebook evidently plays an important role in his day to day routine and of course his sexuality is a defining characteristic of one’s identity so why a separation of the two?

Interestingly, there was a control of other peoples input in order to protect their sexuality and continue to manage their self-presentation within the study. Cathal explains that along with concealing his sexuality, he would not associate himself with any homosexual related content such as page likes as he would not feel comfortable having them on his page, he tells me he would “manage all his settings properly”:

I’d just feel like that just gives people the opportunity to know that you’re gay. So once again, not that I see it as rubbing it in people’s faces but I just like to have people wonder and I want to leave it as normal as possible for me.

He also claims he would be very conscious of what content was put on his page by others for people to see:

Yeah, I definitely would, especially with comments; I’d rather it was just messages, because messages are just something yourself can see or if someone else was on your profile...

Again we must consider the length of time Cathal has been out and to whom. Similar to Teresa who has been out for 8 months, Cathal’s wider audience of Facebook friends may still consider him heterosexual, therefore would rather have people decide for themselves rather than confirm it, also Cathal admits that his newly public sexuality makes him feel uncomfortable, which obviously crosses to his online boundaries.

Again, John, too, is partial to this filtering of profile content claiming if someone put something bad or suggestive on his page he would delete the comment and the person leaving the comment while stating:

I think being gay and not out on Facebook probably is harder than being straight on Facebook cause you have to watch and think about everything. Say if you met someone that's really flamboyant and gay and you want to be friends with them and they're going to post random things, God knows what onto your page, you're going to have to think, right people from work or other people that you don't want to see you're gay are going to see this, so you have to take that into account.

He also does not like any homosexual related pages other than one named "Wipe out Homophobia" which is an open group for anyone of any sexual orientation to like. John even goes as far as monitoring what music he would put on his page. He explains how he enjoyed Madonna's Superbowl performance and wanted to put it on his page but decided against it, when pressed further and asked if he worried it would reveal his sexuality he responded:

Not that they'd think but maybe that they'd be saying "why do you have that up", even at work I was saying about her tickets out and being over €100 and they were all like, why? Do you like her? Jesus Christ why would you go and see her? And then I'm left thinking, what did I say that for? So I specifically didn't put that up, even though nobody probably would have said anything. Like out of all the people I know there, I don't know any straight lad that would post something up about Madonna.

Of all the participants, John's presentation of self was the most particularly monitored, adopting a very carefully presented straight persona, although feeling that leaving options blank did not deny his sexuality, his reluctance to even post music with no gay connotations confirmed his constant online battle between his online and offline persona, and his desire to be viewed as "normal" online. Comfortably straight offline, yet a confliction of identities online can only further fuel my argument that SNS are not ideal place for sexual identity exploration.

Along with identity management of one's self, there was also an element of privacy and protection of other people's sexual orientation, for example Tara*, 22 a student who is out to

her friends and family for the past year has left her relationship status blank, despite the fact she is in long term relationship, doing so to protect the sexuality of her partner:

I don't actually have that up at the minute but the only reason I don't have it up, my girlfriends family don't know yet and I only came out to my family last year, so it's kind of a matter of doing it gradually, so it's just left blank.

While John agrees consideration of the other half would be a motive in disclosing your sexuality online or not:

That's the other thing you have to think about as well, like not about the men but the being in the relationship part, like obviously if the other person isn't out for whatever reasons they don't want people knowing, ya couldn't put in a relationship with "whoever".

Relating back to Goffman's theoretical metaphor of actors performing social roles to please our audience, it is to be noted that Facebook is a mainstream social network site and with the labels, stigma and the fear of being defined as different (Ponse, 1976) attached to homosexuality we must question if those respondents that conceal their sexuality on Facebook do so to enact positive images of their selves to a predominantly straight audience.

According to Goffman, the social actor has the ability to choose the performance he puts on and the identity he adopts for a particular audience and this approach certainly applies online (as found in this study, the majority of the sample chose not to disclose their sexuality), in fact perhaps more so in the virtual realm of the internet than real life.

On the Internet, our front is being presented to the entire world for all time, and therefore can never be relaxed. There is the worry then, even more than real-life performance, over the essential question of whether one can sustain their performance for an audience of over a few hundred spectators. With SNS giving way to multiple identity play, is there then a potential of identity confliction? Then in this sense, if mainstream social networking LGB users feel they must conceal their sexual identities to fit in with their majority straight audience, can we

say almost based on this finding alone that they are not an ideal arena for identity construction?

Fear of being “outed”

Perhaps the most common trend within the sample in relation to concealing their sexual orientation on Facebook was the fear of being “outed”, opting instead to “pass” online. In particular and often found in studies of offline passing (Valentine, 1993; Ponce, 1976) the working environment is site of restrained sexuality, and most of the sample feared being outed at work and as a result chose to filter and carefully monitor aspects of their online identity.

Valentine (1993) found that many lesbians within her study often negotiated heterosexual identities in different settings in order to avoid hostility and discrimination and this remains consistent with this current research, even going so far to protect their sexuality on personal profiles to shield it from colleagues.

Gerard, 22 explains that he would not have a problem with flirty or suggestive comments on his wall, but when asked if he would mind colleagues seeing his opinions change stating: “Well my sexuality isn’t an open discussion at work, so I’d probably be aware of the fact that they could see it, it depends what it was though before I’d go deleting it.”

Tara, 22 controls a consistent straight persona at work, being careful not to reveal her sexual orientation to any colleagues, this aspect of identity management then crosses into online relations as Tara claims that one of the main reasons she manages her online identity and sexuality is largely down to work colleagues accessing her page:

Yeah...like for the people at work that don’t know most of the time it’s because I work with a lot of Filipinos and Indians and they’d be very against people being gay so yeah I kind of wouldn’t want them to know I’m gay.

Again, back to Goffman's presentation of self, we see many of the participants adopting straight personas for targeted audiences; this would prove to be a lesser problem offline as sexuality takes no physical form but because this particular audience who via Facebook is now part of her online social circle, Tara feels almost forced and with no option but to shield her sexuality online.

Edward, 23 who recently graduated from third level and is now working part time in a small shop in his local town explains his motive for protecting his sexuality from work colleagues:

I wouldn't have much things in common with the people I work with, some of them are from different countries and some of them are not small minded...actually yeah small minded... I don't really see the point in disclosing anything with people I have nothing In common with.

Stating that some of them are small minded, which often is the case in small rural towns, may indicate a greater consequence offline for Edward if he chose to reveal his sexuality as he claims if he were in a more professional work place he would have no problem with having his sexuality public on his Facebook:

I think if I was in a more professional work place, or a job related to your degree you're going to have more things in common with people and there's going to be more diverse people there so they'd be a bit more accepting and you'd take your job much more seriously

Ponse (1976) explains the impression management technique of 'passing' in which LGB identified people employ a straight facade in order to avoid being deemed as unusual or different in some crucial way. This fear of being different was expressed by some of the participants as a reason for passing online: "I just didn't want to differentiate from other lads in work, because people would...they might say they wouldn't look at you different but I still think they would, being realistic"-John.

There is also a shared fear of being outed to the entire Facebook audience and not just workmates, regardless of the entire sample asserting their openness to family and friends offline, again many were very careful of what others would say that could potentially out them. John in particular had very strong opinions on this: “Like you have to think who you’re accepting as friends if there gay so there not going to ‘out you’ to everyone,” and again, bringing in the element of the workplace:

If anyone said anything like “are you going to The George this weekend, I’d freak out” and be like “what the fuck are you writing that for”, because if someone say that from work or someone that you don’t want to know goes on and sees that, then you’re ‘outed’.

Grasmuck et al. (2009) addresses this notion of impression management on mainstream SNS exploring Facebook as an ideal condition for exploring identity as it allows users to specify many dimensions of their identity, however given that Facebook is mainstream, Grasmuck questions how realistic ones Facebook claims are when they can be challenged offline.

Concerned with presentation of ethno racial groups, Grasmuck found that these groups which were historically marginalised, like homosexuals, are now “putting themselves out there” on Facebook and possess a strong sense of racial identity pride. However this current study found that on Facebook, and with the fear of being outed offline, sexuality is downplayed, and again I can only assume this is down to the different layers of relationships Facebook provides as Facebook differs from anonymous environments resulting in an unwanted audience.

Revealing sexuality online opens up a whole range of consequences offline, which may be unwelcome but despite this, many feel obliged to accept those they wouldn’t necessarily connect with on a personal level in the real world: “Yeah I am friends with people from work, I kinda have to be, not that I really want to be” – John, Edward agrees, replying “you kinda have to be, but yeah I am friends with people from work but it’s not that I talk to them on It”.

Perhaps this is rooted in the fear of homophobic backlash from people that would not be aware of sexuality offline or in the inner social circle.

Hyper-connected or Hyper-sexualised?

Not only did the majority of the sample find that Facebook wasn't an ideal space for sexual identity construction, feeling it to be much too restrictive due to the differences in audiences, the very mention of LGB SNS triggered a surprisingly negative result.

3 out of the 4 men interviewed had used Gaydar.ie in the past, with one continuing to use it on an occasional basis. Regarding the female sample, 2 had used LGB SNS in the past but not for social networking purposes. However not one of the participants claimed to like using LGB SNS.

There was an agreed consensus that these sites are seedy, sleazy and further stigmatise the LGB population. Rose, 22 explains using LGB SNS requires one to be vigilant because at the end of the day "it is a sexual topic and there is obviously a good and bad side to it" mainly she finds that this is down to unwanted advances:

I think with things that are LGBT specific, I mean if it's something professional, like a professional sub group which is closed, say for example GCN (Gay Community News) have a subgroup, that's fine, but you find, with anything that's sexually specific you are going to have people writing mail and be like "hey babes". I don't want to get involved in that sort of thing.

In particular the males that used Gaydar.ie shared this opinion claiming that the site is basically for hooking up. Gerard explains "the impression I got from it was that it's basically fucking...haha, sorry! It's purely sex" and furthermore continues to explain that despite the advantages there are still cautions:

Well if somebody lived a sheltered life and had no other gay friends or if they had no other contact with people who's gay then yeah go for it. But don't expect anything nice, I didn't have a positive experience on it.

John agrees claiming: "I'd say about 5% of people on that are looking for a date and the rest are just looking for "are you free now, let's go". This element of promiscuity and hooking up factor obviously has an impact on identity construction. None of the sample using these LGB sites used a profile picture at present for fear again of being seen despite these sites targeted to an LGB audience. Edward goes as far to say: "I'd rather they saw me on Facebook and be like normal, not normal, but less sleazy."

Rose voiced a very strong opinion of LGB SNS feeling they shine a negative light on the larger LGB community. Using sites such as After Ellen and GCN, Rose does not display a picture on any profile and uses these sites primarily for blogging rather than social networking:

I mean there are, whether people like to admit it or not and I don't mean to be branding them, but it's a fact but there is a promiscuity, there is, like I said with sexual topics there is a sexual side to it and then with that you have people that are silly and kind of take over the reins a bit, put up silly things, and put a bad light on it all. I mean it's the reason why people could look at the LGB society and say this is why there shouldn't be gay marriage, they aren't taking it seriously, it's just a big joke and their sexuality isn't real.

After analysing the profile pages of the men that use Gaydar, it is easy to see where this perception originates. The site has millions of users and provides an option for getting to know men in your area. On the profile page there is the option to state what you are looking for, ranging from friendship, e-mailing, relationships and to group sex and beyond. The undertones of the site scream sex and despite the men of the sample claiming it to be a social network site, the majority of the men I viewed (not the sample) on it were looking for one thing.

When asked then if these sites promote a sense of belonging and feeling part a wider identity, as suggested by McKenna and Bargh (1998), the majority disagreed. John who no longer uses Gaydar but once did for meeting people in his area (unsuccessfully) claims: “Like you would feel like obviously that everyone’s gay and your all the same or whatever but that’s not really the aim of the website, it’s basically just for hooking people up. So it’s kind of clinical and cold”, similarly Edward, who still uses Gaydar occasionally, agrees feeling LGB SNS do not encompass a sense of identity:

I don’t think there’s an identity, no, I don’t think it does. Because, It’s not very commutative, it’s just, everyone’s out for something, your either out for something or not and I think if you don’t reach peoples goals or standards and are too far away from them or whatever the feck it is, they don’t want to know. So it’s not like a community or that, everyone’s out for their own goals and that’s it!

The participants that have not used LGB SNS in the past express no desire to do so in the near future, sharing this view that there are hyper sexualised and not a suitable place for sexual identity exploration. Joan*, 25 who has not used them in the past and is completely open about her sexuality on Facebook states “I don’t think they’re a good place to explore your sexuality; it’s all sleazebags on those sort of networks. I wouldn’t use them anyway.”

Without ever having been on a LGB SNS, it is powerful judgement to make, however she is not alone in this thought as Teresa who also has never accessed these sites believes “people that use them to explore their sexuality are usually people that aren’t open or only coming out and I think people on those sites take advantage of that”.

To an extent the views of Teresa and Joan can be seen as naive and stereotypical as having never accessed these sites how they can determine a valid view. However Cathal reverts back to identity management for his rationale in refusal to experience LGB restricted SNS:

No I don’t for the fear again id meet someone else on it and I saw them down the town or somewhere and they’d be telling their friends “oh he’s on a gay SNS”, like I want to do as natural as everyone else does it. Straight people go and meet people on a

night out, I don't want to have go on a SNS to meet somebody, if I'm going to meet someone I'm going to meet them the normal way.

Again this fear of being viewed as different and in particular being seen on a site which appeals to a minority group within society reproduces identity restrictions for Cathal, in his case it seems there is no environment online to suit him in providing a space identity construction.

After comparing the two types of SNS it seems pretty evident that there is a deep fear rooted in the sample that revealing their sexuality will somehow have a negative consequence offline. Although it must be noted that the sample expressed advantages of SNS, including keeping up to date with events and using LGB pages to meet other people, there is still the fear that social network sites are an expansion of offline in relation to homophobic behaviour, as Rose points out "the biggest LGB form of bullying, statistically, comes from online and on the internet."

Similarly John and Cathal agree, with Cathal admitting to having received homophobic harassment on his Facebook page in the past, which then can transverse offline:

It would be easier to target gay men for abuse because it's something that's an instant...an easy target, it's like if someone is black then you have an instant negative thing you could say about the with racist comments, you instantly have something against them that you can use to ruin their night or to put them in a bad buzz. So maybe subconsciously that's why I don't have anything up, you're opening yourself up for possible homophobic attacks.

John taking more liberal approach about the homophobic element feels it is down to the individual:

Yeah I think it does reinforce homophobia but I think it's down to the individual person, it's not like the makers of Facebook designed it that way, but maybe it's what I'm doing that's reinforcing homophobia, I'm reinforcing I by not putting up interested in men and that, so it's the individual more so, like it doesn't say on Facebook you can't join if you are gay. So it's up to the individual on the SNS.

And it is with this notion in mind that I draw an overall conclusion in relation to social networking sites as a platform for identity construction. Overall as a result of the above three findings, I am led to believe that social networking sites are not an ideal location for sexual identity, however I don't believe it to be a fault of the SNS as such but in the individual users as John expresses.

It's no new finding that homophobia is rife online but the findings of this study reveal much more, it is increasing more so on SNS now, as much the study felt, regardless of never having experienced it but managing in order to prevent it. Every participant interviewed claimed to be openly gay offline, so then why such a fear of being outed and why such careful presentation of self online? Again none of the sample reported what would happen in case of a revelation and it is my suspicion that in fact not a huge deal would happen.

It is evident that the LGB sample struggled to find a suitable place online in regards to their sexuality. On one hand Facebook posed the threat of being outed, forcing closeted behaviour and on the other hand sites specially intended for an LGB audience were viewed as smutty. So therefore where is the medium? Where online is there a site that an LGB audience can blend in, feel normal, but talk and have friends that share similar values and interests as themselves.

Ultimately I believe that Facebook provides this space, it has all the options available for one to integrate their sexuality into their social networking experience. However because of the heteronormative nature of networking and the large following Facebook has it has surpassed ones inner social circle and created social ties with those they normally would not associate with on a normal offline basis.

This in turn then is reinforcing the homophobic behaviour such as passing, because of the large scale audience and different styles of relationship Facebook offers. It is not in fact the

nature of Facebook that restricts identity but it is denial offline to a small audience that is actually a reflection of offline.

In terms of future research I do believe there is scope for a wide scale study under the same topic with a broader sample of a more mixed age. Because the majority of the participants were students and in their early 20s it can be argued they are in fact still trying to accommodate their offline identities comfortably before integrating it online which therefore may have altered the results.

Similarly a large scale study based on Facebook relationships and how they have consequences on an LGB audience would provide a more in dept analysis on how sexual identities alter online and explanations why. However it is safe to say from this research that the sociological nature of SNS has evolved, departing radically from the assumption that SNS are an ideal arena for identity construction for LGB identified people.

It is my estimation based on findings that it's primarily due to the changing audiences and certain audience LGB people feel uncomfortable with offline. In turn I wrap up with a comment I feel sums up completely the basis of this finding:

“I don't think it necessarily reinforces homophobia but until you get rid of the homophobia offline then you're never going to get rid of it offline. I think you have to start with the reality and then go to virtual stuff” (Tara).

Notes

- * Indicates pseudonym

- LGB: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual
- SNS: Social network site(s)