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An Exploration Of Social Media Use Among Multiply Minoritized LGBTQ Youth

Alfie Leanna Lucero

University of Texas at El Paso, allucero2@utep.edu

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**AN EXPLORATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE AMONG MULTIPLY
MINORITIZED LGBTQ YOUTH**

ALFIE LEANNA LUCERO

Department of Teacher Education

APPROVED:

Brian H. Giza, Ph.D., Co-Chair

Char Ullman, Ph.D., Co-Chair

Brenda Risch, Ph.D.

Benjamin C. Flores, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Dallas, the best friend I ever had and to the memory of my loving father, Roland Scott. Despite the fact that my dad is no longer with me, his love and character have served as a constant inspiration in my life. He taught me that blood is not always thicker than water, and that loving someone is a choice we make everyday. He always made me feel special, loved, and respected, and that has served as one of the greatest factors in developing me into the individual that I am today. It is with great honor that I dedicate this incredibly important milestone in my life to my amazing father.

**AN EXPLORATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE AMONG MULTIPLY MINORITIZED
LGBTQ YOUTH**

by

ALFIE LEANNA LUCERO, M. Ed.

DISSERTATION

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Being a graduate student is like becoming all of the Seven Dwarves. In the beginning you're Dopey and Bashful. In the middle, you are usually Sneezzy (sick), Sleepy, and Grumpy. But at the end, they call you Doc, and then you're Happy.

-Azuma, 1997.

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Abstract

This study responds to a need for research in a fast-growing and significant area of study, that of exploring, understanding, and documenting the numerous ways that multiply marginalized LGBTQ youth between the ages of 14 and 17 use social media. The primary research question examined whether social media provide safe spaces for multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth to express and explore issues of sexuality and gender. In addition, the study explores and categorizes multiple ways that the participants interact with social media and makes comparisons to prior work with more general populations. The study provides descriptions of the participants in terms of demographic information, accessibility to social media, frequency of activity within social media sites such as Facebook, their use of social media to learn about people and explore new relationships, their types and levels of commitment to social media, and their perception of being comfortable online to express and explore issues of sexuality and gender identity. The findings suggest that social media such as Facebook are an important aspect in most of the participants' lives. The results suggest that social media have become a safer space for LGBTQ youth, specifically multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth. Because previous studies of this kind that focus on this population do not exist, this study provides a baseline for continued research in the intersection of Queer studies and the fast growing field of new media research.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|------|
| Acknowledgements..... | v |
| Abstract..... | viii |
| List of Tables | xv |
| List of Figures | xvi |
| Chapter 1-Introduction..... | 1 |
| Background and Context..... | 1 |
| Problem..... | 4 |
| Statement of Purpose and Research Questions..... | 4 |
| Research Approach | 5 |
| Theoretical Framework..... | 5 |
| Data gathering methods | 6 |
| Overall population, site, and rationale | 7 |
| Anticipated Outcomes..... | 7 |
| Researcher Assumptions and Limitations..... | 8 |
| Assumptions..... | 8 |
| Limitations | 8 |
| Rationale & Significance | 9 |
| Organization of Proposal | 9 |
| Summary | 10 |
| Chapter 2- Review of the Literature | 11 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction..... | 11 |
| Theoretical Framework: Queer Theory Through a Feminist Lens | 12 |
| Gender Performance | 13 |
| Sexual Fluidity | 14 |
| LGBTQ Identities | 15 |
| Identity Development..... | 15 |
| Traditional Models of LGBTQ Identity Development | 16 |
| Gay and lesbian identity model..... | 16 |
| Lesbian identity development model..... | 18 |
| Bisexual identity development model..... | 19 |
| Gender and theories of its development..... | 19 |
| Modern Scholars of LGBTQ Identity Development | 20 |
| Social Media and Identity Development..... | 22 |
| Social Construction of Identity | 23 |
| Minoritized Status and Discrimination | 23 |
| Support Systems for LGBTQ Youth | 25 |
| Gay-Straight Alliances..... | 25 |
| It Gets Better Project..... | 26 |
| Social Media/Social Networking | 26 |
| Defining social media | 27 |
| Construction of Social Networks: Profiles, Friends, and Comments | 29 |
| Social Media and Youth Identity Construction | 30 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Summary | 31 |
| Chapter 3: Methodology | 33 |
| Purpose and Introduction | 33 |
| Research Design..... | 34 |
| Target Population, Sample, and Participant Selection..... | 35 |
| Instrumentation | 37 |
| Part One: Demographic Measures | 38 |
| Part Two: Accessibility..... | 39 |
| Part Three: Frequency of Activities..... | 39 |
| Communication with others..... | 40 |
| Connection strategies..... | 40 |
| Engagement with photos/videos..... | 40 |
| Engagement with games..... | 40 |
| Part Four: Connection Strategies | 41 |
| Part Five: Commitment to Social Media | 42 |
| Part Six: Expressive Freedom in an Online Space..... | 43 |
| Research Procedures | 46 |
| Data Analysis | 48 |
| Ethical Considerations | 49 |
| Assumptions..... | 50 |
| Limitations | 51 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Summary | 53 |
| Chapter 4- Research Findings and Analysis | 54 |
| Introduction..... | 54 |
| Results..... | 55 |
| Participant Demographics | 55 |
| Accessibility..... | 58 |
| Frequency of Activity Scale and Reliability | 60 |
| Learn about New People Scale and Reliability..... | 63 |
| These results indicate that most participants agree that they use Facebook as a tool to learn about new people. The most common tool used for learning about people was to use Facebook to check out someone that participants had met socially. | 64 |
| Explore New Relationships Scale and Reliability | 64 |
| Commitment | 65 |
| Comfort Online | 67 |
| Discussion | 70 |
| Summary | 73 |
| Chapter 5 - Discussions, Implications, and Recommendations..... | 75 |
| Introduction..... | 75 |
| Discussion..... | 75 |
| Implications and Contributions..... | 77 |
| Recommendations..... | 78 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Suggestions for Further Study | 79 |
| Summary | 80 |
| Conclusion | 82 |
| References | 83 |
| Appendix A- Definitions of Terminology | 96 |
| Bisexual | 97 |
| Cyberbullying | 97 |
| Facebook | 97 |
| Gay | 97 |
| Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) | 97 |
| Hispanic and Latina/o | 97 |
| Lesbian | 98 |
| LGBTQ | 98 |
| Multiply Minoritized Youth | 98 |
| Qualtrics | 99 |
| Social Media | 99 |
| Transgender | 99 |
| Queer | 100 |
| Questioning | 100 |
| Youth | 100 |
| Appendix B- Informed Consent and Survey | 101 |
| Appendix C- Recruitment Flyer | 108 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Appendix D- List of Resources Provided to Participants | 109 |
| Vita..... | 111 |

List of Tables

| | |
|--|----|
| Table 1: Survey Questions and Categories | 44 |
| Table 2: Age of Participants | 55 |
| Table 3: Race/Ethnicity of Participants..... | 56 |
| Table 4: Gender of Participants..... | 57 |
| Table 5: Sexuality of Participants..... | 57 |
| Table 6: Geographic Location of Participants | 58 |
| Table 7: Accessibility | 59 |
| Table 8: The mean and standard deviation of the “frequency of Facebook activity scale” ... | 61 |
| Table 9: The mean and standard deviation of the “learn about new people scale” | 64 |
| Table 10: The mean and standard deviation of the “explore new relationships scale” | 65 |
| Table 11: The mean and standard deviation of the “commitment scale” | 66 |
| Table 12: The mean and standard deviation of the “comfort online scale” | 68 |

List of Figures

| | |
|--|----|
| Figure 1: Social Media Safety and Engagement Model..... | 46 |
| Figure 2: Types of Social Media Used at Least Once a Week..... | 60 |
| Figure 3: Frequency of Performing Facebook Activities..... | 63 |
| Figure 4: Number of Facebook Friends | 67 |
| Figure 5: Participants Who Are Cyberbullied | 72 |

Chapter 1-Introduction

All young people, regardless of sexual orientation or identity, deserve a safe and supportive environment in which to achieve their full potential.

-Harvey Milk

Background and Context

On September 22, 2010 at 8:42pm, Tyler Clementi used Facebook to post the following suicide message, "Jumping off the gw bridge sorry." Clementi's suicide was prompted by his college roommate's decision to secretly use a Twitter page, web cams, and iChat to "out" Clementi by streaming live video of Clementi's same-sex intimate encounter on the Internet. Clementi's roommate, Dharun Ravi, used a Twitter page to post the following tweet on September 19, 2010, "Roommate asked for the room till midnight. I went into molly's room and turned on my webcam. I saw him making out with a dude. Yay." On September 21, Ravi posted the following, "Anyone with iChat, I dare you to video chat me between the hours of 9:30 and 12. Yes it's happening again." In less than twenty-four hours after this outing, Clementi used social media to post his suicide note (Friedman, 2010).

Billy Lucas was a 15-year-old teenager who was the target of constant bullying based on his sexual orientation. In 2010 Billy committed suicide because he could no longer bear the pressures of being taunted and tormented about it. Shortly after his death, a Facebook memorial page was created in Billy's memory. Amongst the comments by friends and family, his page was infiltrated with anti-gay bashes and slurs. Social media served as a tool for continued harassment even after Billy had ended his life.

Social media such as Facebook have allowed for the ease and quickness of communication. Social media (see Appendix A) are defined by Boyd and Ellison (2007) 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 by others within the system” (p. 211). In a virtual world, status updates and messages can be seen almost instantaneously. Often we see this as an improved means of communication, however, in instances such as the ones described above, a tragic message can be delivered, questioning the positive impact of virtual communication.

In 2011 the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) conducted a National School Climate Survey with 8,584 youth (N=8,584). They found that 55.2 percent of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning¹ (LGBTQ) youth experienced electronic harassment (via text message or Facebook posting), known as cyberbullying, in the past year (GLSEN, 2011, p. xiv-xv). Given these statistics and the recent onslaught of LGBTQ youth suicides, it is time to question the dynamics of online spaces through scholarly investigation and research.

On the other hand, social media provide tools to access information and support systems that were once out of reach for many teens who were not only uncomfortable discussing issues of gender and sexuality but were also demonized and seen as aberrant. For instance, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Questioning (LGBTQ) teens can seek support through social media from Facebook pages and social networks such as The It Get’s Better Project, Coalition for Queer Youth, Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), and numerous other organizations.

¹ See Appendix A for a detailed definition of LGBTQ and other terms used in this study.

The It Gets Better Project, founded in 2010 by Dan Savage and Terry Miller, is a social media tool that was created in response to the recent onslaught of LGBTQ teen suicides such as the ones previously mentioned. The project uses YouTube videos to reach LGBTQ and argue that circumstances will improve for youth once they reach adulthood. One of the powerful components about this project is that people can access this site from anywhere, removing the need to seek out an established support system in a particular space. It is understood that many youth's social media usage is monitored at home and at school, which compromises the level of privacy that teenagers hypothetically have with their technology devices. However, potentially, users can discreetly watch videos with new levels of privacy through the use of computers, laptops, and mobile devices. This opens up the door to possibly reaching so many more young people who lack the support systems needed to develop a positive LGBTQ identity.

For young adults, it is nearly impossible to realize that a world existed without the Internet and other forms of new technology. According to the PEW Internet and American Life Project (2005) young adults born after the mid 1980s socialize online and use the Internet more than previous generations. Since its public launch in 1991, the World Wide Web has been able to deliver a wealth of information almost instantaneously with little economic cost, but with huge personal costs such as the suicides highlighted at the beginning of this chapter. New Media and modern technology have brought the ability to stay connected with the world through text messaging, Twitter, MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and other technological tools from almost anywhere. These are but a few of the factors that have caused more people than not to embrace modern technology without hesitation.

Although technology has been embraced without hesitation, it is evident that it should be embraced with caution due to the issues and concerns previously mentioned. Likewise, media is

a fast evolving area in terms of use and therefore a fast evolving area in terms of research as well. Additionally, new media should become an area of focus for educational research and research concerning minoritized youth identity construction. However, current educational literature has yet to fully explore such constructs.

Problem

Modern day technologies, such as social media, have become a prominent driving force for socializing and entertainment (boyd, 2008; boyd & Ellison, 2007; Gray, 2009; Turkle, 2008). However, social media is challenging notions about youth's identity development and construction (Gross, 2004/2007; Nakamura, 2002; Russell, 2002; Sundén, 2003; Turkle 1995, 1997 & 2008). The prominence, influence, and freshness of social media warrant the need for exploring the influence and role social media play in identity formation of youth, particularly multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth. The term, *multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth* (See Appendix A for a list of terminology used in this study), refers to youth between the ages of 14 and 17 whose sexual orientation, race, and gender fall into minoritized categories. For example a 16 year old Latina, Lesbian, female living in a border region or an 17 year old Asian-Pacific Islander, transgender, bisexual would be considered a multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth. Multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth are an important group to study because there have been no research studies conducted on this population and their uses of social media.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore and document the way multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth, such as Latina/o LGBTQ youth, use social media and to determine their levels of engagement with social media. With an interest in exploring the relationship between social

media and LGBTQ youth identity development, the following research questions were developed:

1. *Do social media provide safe spaces for multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth to express and explore issues of sexuality and gender?*
2. *What levels of engagement do multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth have with social media, such as Facebook?*
3. *What levels of commitment do multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth have with social media such as Facebook?*
4. *What types of activities do multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth most frequently perform on Facebook?*
5. *What types of connection strategies do multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth use on Facebook?*

These questions will act as the guiding questions for this study and the methods of inquiry and data collection.

Research Approach

Theoretical Framework

The paradigms that were used to guide this research were social constructionist (Bandura, 1986; Bell, 2007; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Driscoll, 1994; Featherstone, 1992; Gergen, 1991; Giddens, 1990; Jonassen, 1991; Kellner, 1992; Vygotsky, 1978; Young 1997) and queer theory rooted in post-modern feminism (Beasley, 2005; Blume & Blume, 2003; Butler, 1990, 1993; DeReus, Few, & Blume, 2005; Collins, 2000; Foucault, 1977, 1978, & 1980; Gamson & Moon, 2004; Richardson, McLaughlin, & Casey, 2006; Sedgwick, 1990; Valocchi, 2005; Warner, 1993 & 2005). In an endeavor to explore the relationship between social media and multiply

marginalized LGBTQ youth, queer theory and social constructivism served as the guiding theoretical framework for this investigation. Further discussions of these theoretical frameworks will be discussed in chapter two.

Data gathering methods

The research method was a descriptive quantitative study design utilizing survey research. The survey is a cross-sectional survey that collected information from a relevant sample at one particular point in time from November 2012 to April 2013. This was a non-experimental study with numerous limitations imposed upon it by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval process, which negated the possibility of certain stronger research designs at this time. For example, follow up interviews would have strengthened the understanding of participants' views, but were not an available option considering the anonymity and safety mandated by the ethical considerations in working with minoritized under-age individuals.

Data collected from the online survey included numerical data based on Likert-type rating scales with operationally defined categories of accessibility to social media, frequency of activities within social media, connection strategies used within social media, commitment to social media, and comfort in online spaces. Demographic information was obtained through questions that focus on the participants' age, gender, race, geographic location, sexual attraction, sexual orientation, and gender expression. The survey can be found in Appendix B. The survey instrument is a combination of Junco's (2012) survey instrument, Ellison, Steinfield, & Lamps (2007) Facebook intensity scale (FBI) and items created by the researcher. The surveys were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. An in-depth discussion about the survey instrument, reliability of the instrument, and methods of data analysis is provided in chapter three.

Overall population, site, and rationale

The target population for this study was multiply marginalized LGBTQ youth between the ages of 13 and 17 who live in a border region. Participants were recruited through the use of purposeful and snowball sampling via web recruitment through the Facebook pages of organizations such as: PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), GSAs (Gay-Straight Alliances), GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network), and Rio Grande Adelante, which are all organization that offer support to LGBTQ people. A recruitment flyer was also created and posted in the above organizations as well. The selected participants were willing and accessible to articulate their personal experience about the specific phenomenon being studied by answering a brief online survey. Participant involvement began in November 2012 and concluded in April 2013. The sample for this study was 19 (N = 19) voluntary participants who self-identified as a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and/or Queer/Questioning youth between 14-17 years of age of varying ethnic-racial backgrounds and as users of social media. A detailed discussion about the demographics of these participants can be found in chapter four.

Anticipated Outcomes

Gross (2007) explains that in 2000, *Out-Proud* and *Oasis Magazine* conducted one of the largest online surveys targeting the LGBT community aged 25 or younger. Out of the 6,872 participants, two-thirds reported that being online helped them accept their sexual orientation; over one-third reported that being online was essential to this acceptance. A large number of these participants came out online prior to doing so offline. boyd (2007) explains, “Social network sites are providing teens with a space to work out identity and status, make sense of cultural cues, and negotiate public life” (p. 2). Going online provides many individuals the

opportunity to create their identity and shed the masks they wear in everyday life (Gabriel, 1995; Sundén, 2003), and it can also provide a supportive LGBTQ online community.

It was anticipated that this study would have similar findings to previous research and provide evidence that systems, such as social media, provide sexual minority youth with a safe place to work out identities and negotiate public life through written and oral performances.

Researcher Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

The first assumption made in this study is that social media provide multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth a potentially safe place to work out identity and negotiate public life through written and created performances. This assumption is based upon findings of previous research conducted by boyd (2007).

The second assumption was based upon the construction of identities. This researcher does not fully accept the additive model of identity. That is, identities are not envisioned as discrete entities that are piled on top of each other, and that are not impacted or transformed by other identities. Rather, like Gray (2009), this researcher views the construction of identities as, “technosocial processes that entangle multiple sites and fields of power beyond the location of a solitary person” (p. 4). In essence, identity is always being constructed, impacted by different powers, impacted by other aspects of identity, and is most often worked out in social arenas.

Limitations

Limitations refer to restrictions in the study that are beyond the control of the researcher. Based on the research design and assumptions for this study, it is imperative to mention potential limitations associated with this study. Limitations for this study included: the method itself, data dependent upon participants’ truthfulness and willingness to share personal experiences, method

of sampling, method of recruitment, and the numerous IRB regulations surrounding the technicalities of working with LGBTQ youth. A detailed discussion of limitations is provided in chapter three.

Rationale & Significance

Unfortunately, LGBTQ individuals continue to be marginalized in society (GLSEN, 2011; Huckaby, 2008; and Meyer, 2003; Meyer, 2008). One area in particular where this marginalization takes place in the practice of educational research. For example, there are few studies that have been conducted linking the relationship between social media and LGBTQ youth identity construction (Boyd, 2007; Gray, 2009; O’Riordan & Phillips, 2007; Pullen & Cooper, 2010), and none that have been conducted that focus solely on multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth. This paucity needs to be addressed. This study, focusing on social media and multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth will contribute to the body of queer, media, and educational knowledge currently available. This study is one of the first to explore and document the use of social media by multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth between the ages of 14-17 years old. Because of the ages of the study participants, this study provides an unprecedented glimpse into the role social media plays in the lives of marginalized teens as they use social media rather than as they remember using it years later as in a retrospective study.

Organization of Research Study

Subsequent chapters within this study will identify specific areas of focus for this research study. Specifically, chapter two focuses on a review of existing literature on LGBTQ youth, identity construction, and social media. This review of literature highlights the limited studies on the relationship between social media, Latina/o LGBTQ youth, identity construction, social constructivism, and queer theory through a feminist lens.

Chapter three focuses on the specific methodology aspects of this study. The methodology section includes detailed information regarding the rationale for the method of research, identification of the target and sample population, data collection method, methods for data analysis and synthesis, ethical considerations, and limitations.

Chapter four focuses on a discussion surrounding the findings of this study, and chapter five provides recommendations based on the findings of this study as well as recommendations for further research.

Summary

This chapter specifically emphasizes the significance and importance of this study reiterating that this study was one of the first to explore and document the use of social media by multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth between the ages of 14-17 years old. This chapter also described the critical components that serve as the foundation for this research study: problem, purpose, and research questions. The interconnectedness of these components is of paramount importance because the success of this investigation weighed heavily on the construction and alignment of these components. In addition to these major components, chapter one also described other pertinent elements, including research approach, researcher assumptions and limitations, rationale and significance, and anticipated outcomes.

Chapter 2- Review of the Literature

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore, understand, and document the multiple ways multiply minoritized Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and/or Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ) youth use social media as a tool for the construction of identities. To conduct this interdisciplinary study, it was necessary to complete a critical review of the literature related to this problem. Literature related to queer theory through a feminist lens, identity construction, and social media was reviewed and included in this critique. This study about the uses of social media among multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth will contribute to the body of queer, media, and youth research providing a view of social media as a positive resource in identity construction of multiply marginalized LGBTQ youth based on constructs not yet fully explored.

There is scant research that has been conducted focusing on social media use among LGBTQ youth 17 and younger (Gray, 2009), and none focusing solely on multiply marginalized LGBTQ youth, such as Latina/o LGBTQ youth, clearly identifying a paucity in the research that needed to be addressed. Gray's (2009) ethnographic study examined rural LGBTQ youth (N=34) 18 years of age and younger in the Central Appalachian region and the influence of new media on the construction of sexual and gender identities. While new media was not the sole focus of her study, it was one of the topics explored in her study. She found that new media, such as cable television and the Internet, are one piece of the puzzle in the construction of sexual and gender identities of rural LGBTQ youth. Gray (2009) uses an approach to studying new media that she calls "in situ" and explains, "This approach requires tracing the circulations and layers of socioeconomic status, race relations, and location in the lives of people I met that make their media engagements meaningful to them" (p. 127). That is, she does not place media at the

center of her study in an attempt to determine its isolated impacts on identity construction, rather she situates media within a larger realm of identity work looking at the interactions of multiple domains and how those interactions make media meaningful. While Gray's (2009) study provides significant findings that suggest that new media is one of many factors that impact identity construction, she does not provide a thorough examination of the types of social media used by LGBTQ youth and youth's levels of comfort and safety within social media. Furthermore, her study does not focus on social media specifically nor on multiply marginalized LGBTQ youth.

Theoretical Framework: Queer Theory Through a Feminist Lens

In an endeavor to identify positive influences of social media on identities of multiply marginalized LGBTQ youth, Queer Theory served as the theoretical framework for this investigation. Queer theory (through a feminist lens) serves as the foundation of this study because it provides a framework for understanding the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality and its impacts on participants' experiences with social media and brings forth the complexity of the construction of sexual and gender identities in social arenas such as social networks.

Queer theory began to surface in the United States in the mid-1980s, and was based on ideas from post-modern theory and feminist perspectives about gender and sexuality. Namaste (1994) explains that post-modern theory contends, "subjects are not the autonomous creators of themselves or their social worlds. Rather, subjects are embedded in a complex network of social relations" (p. 221). That is, identities are socially produced through discourse and negotiation. For example, Foucault (1980) argues that although same-sex relations have always existed, the homosexual identity did not exist until the discursive formation and negotiation of the category *homosexual* around 1892.

Crawley & Broad (2008) explain that queer theorists view the world as “composed of falsely bounded categories that give the impression of fixity and permanence where none ‘naturally’ exists” (p. 551). Creswell (2007) adds, “Queer theory explores the complexities of the construct, identity, and how identities reproduce and ‘perform’ in social forums (p. 29). In essence, “Queer theory pushes us to examine gender, sexuality, and family as interdependent binaries to be negotiated through human agency in the face of heteronormative power” (Oswald, Kuvalanka, Blume, & Berkowitz, 2009, p. 45). That is, queer theory serves as a theory of knowledge for understanding the construction of identity as a complex and fluid performance produced in social arenas and affected by power relationships and discourse.

Gender Performance

Butler (1990) challenged the theoretical framework of *feminism*, by rejecting the idea of binaries as well as separating gender and sex. She argued that women should not be lumped together as a similar group because this categorization creates a binary that seeks to create universal categories of man and woman. She objects to the idea that woman and man are essential categories. From the rejection of this binary, she argues that gender is not natural, but rather it is produced by iterative performances over time. She challenged the biological account of the body, arguing that everything is socially negotiated through discourse, and that there is nothing outside of discourse. Furthermore, Butler aimed to break the assumed link between sex and gender, suggesting that gender and desire are free and are not fixed constructs dependent upon each other. Drawing on Foucault, Butler (1990) explains, “It becomes impossible to separate our ‘gender’ from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained” (p. 4-5). Butler further iterates, “Gender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time” (p. 20). In

essence, gender is constructed from repetitive performances affected by a multitude of power relations and is not a stable construct. Furthermore, gender should be seen as a fluid variable, which shifts and changes in different cultural contexts and at different times in history. Butler (1990) explains, "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender...identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be results" (p. 25). That is, gender is a performance, what one does at a particular moment in time; it is not a universal definitive factor of oneself.

Sexual Fluidity

Diamond (2008a) describes sexual fluidity as a "situation-dependent flexibility in women's sexual responsiveness," which "makes it possible for some women to experience desires for either men or women under certain circumstances, regardless of their overall sexual orientation" (p. 3). That is, sexuality is not a fixed-variable but can change over time and in situations. However, simply because sexual desire changes, it does not mean that sexual orientation changes. For example, a lesbian can have sexual desires for a man and still be a lesbian. On the other hand, a female can self-identify as lesbian and later identify as bisexual or straight. Diamond (2008a) explains that she is "among the growing number of social sciences who view sexual feelings and experiences as simultaneously embedded in both physical-biological and sociocultural contexts that require integrated biosocial research strategies" (p. 22). In other words, sexuality is a complex variable, dependent upon social and biological factors.

Diamond's study (2008a) was the first longitudinal project to follow young women's transitions in sexuality over a ten-year period of time. Her study concluded that females in her study often changed their sexual identities and sexual behavior over time. Her study excluded males; therefore no comparison of this nature can be determined because a longitudinal study of

this nature has not been conducted with men. However, previous studies (Bancroft, 1989; Cass 1990; & Money, 1988) suggest that sexuality is not fixed, and individuals experience sexual feelings that contradict their sexual identity.

Social media provide a virtual space for individuals to explore gender and sexuality by providing a safe space for the ongoing construction of identity through text (Laukkanen, 2007; O'Brien 1999). boyd (2007) explains that social network sites provide teens “with a space to work out identity and status, make sense of cultural cues, and negotiate public life” through written, and created, performances (2007, p. 2). Queer theory was a useful foundation and framework for understanding the participants’ sexual identity and gender identity in this research study.

LGBTQ Identities

Identity Development

Erikson (1959) explains identity formation as “an evolving configuration... gradually integrating constitutional givens, idiosyncratic libidinal needs, favored capacities, significant identifications, effective defenses, successful sublimations, and consistent roles ” (p. 125). In essence, teenage years are the times in which individuals explore, negotiate, and construct their identities. Pascoe (2007) further explains adolescence “as a time in which teenagers work to create identity and make the transition from childhood to adulthood. It is also constructed as a turbulent time psychologically, biologically, and socially” (p. 16). Many modern theorists have studied identity and adolescence over the years (Berger, 1963; Berger, Berger, & Kellner, 1978; Bell, 2007; Featherstone, 1992; Gergen, 1991; Giddens, 1990; Kellner, 1992; Lesko, 2012) and agree that adolescence is a trying time because of the complexity of identity construction.

Traditional Models of LGBTQ Identity Development

Traditional LGBTQ identity development models for understanding LGBTQ youth, assumed that individuals progressed through a sequence of specific milestones prior to recognizing, identifying, and “coming out” as a member of the LGBT community (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Minton & McDonald, 1984; Plummer, 1975; Troiden, 1989). These theoretical approaches about LGBTQ identity construction have evolved over time, and although some of the traditional approaches may seem dated, they are part of the history of thinking about identity development.

Gay and lesbian identity model.

The Cass Model (1979) was the first model and most supported model for explaining the identity construction of gay and lesbian (GL) identities. The Cass Model is a linear model intended to describe the process of development of a GL identity. Bisexual and Transgender were not included in this model because the categories of bisexual and transgender did not yet exist. The Cass Model is based on a theory that assumes the interaction between the person and the environment, which is known as interpersonal congruency theory (Morrow, 2006). In essence, movement through the stages in the Cass model is reliant on an individual’s positive interaction to the environment in regards to issues of homosexuality. The stages of the Cass Model includes six stages:

Stage 1 – Identity confusion – Individuals become aware of same-sex attractions that are contradictory to heteronormative attraction.

Stage 2 – Identity comparison – Individuals begin to accept the notion that they may be gay or lesbian and compare themselves to heterosexual and homosexual cultures. Individuals in this stage often feel socially isolated and seek to find people like them.

Stage 3 – Identity tolerance – Individuals become sure they are gay or lesbian. Social isolation forces individuals to seek out other GL people. Social contacts at this stage become imperative for positive GL identity development to continue.

Stage 4 – Identity acceptance – Individuals become certain they are gay or lesbian and positively accept this identity of themselves. Individuals become more open about their sexuality, but are careful about disclosure for fear of negative consequences or lack of acceptance.

Stage 5 – Identity pride – Individuals are aware of the social stigma of gay and lesbian identities, however a strong sense of pride of oneself is established. Individuals begin to categorize other people as either heterosexual or GL.

Stage 6 – Identity synthesis – Individuals at this stage no longer feel the need to place individuals into categories of heterosexual and GL. Sexual orientation becomes less of a main issue in terms of the individual's identity.

The stages in this linear model suggests that individuals must pass from one stage to the next ultimately achieving *identity synthesis* in order to fully accept their sexual identity. This model assumes that all GL individuals progress through their identity development in the same manner. There is limited research to support the Cass Model of identity development (Cass, 1984; Kahn, 1991; Lark & Croteau, 1998; and Levine, 1997). Cass (1984) conducted a study with 178 participants (N = 178) who were predominately male (n = 109), and she concluded that there was support for her linear model. The problem with this research is that it is predominately based on the experiences of gay males rather than lesbians.

Lesbian identity development model.

Because the Cass Model was based upon the experiences of gay men, several theorists (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Chapman & Brannock, 1987; Ponse, 1978; Raphael, 1974; and Sophie, 1986) developed models focusing solely on lesbian identity development. One of the most widely accepted models is the model proposed by McCarn & Fassinger. This model is comprised of four phases intended to be viewed as a circular progression in which individuals do not have to move through phases in a linear progression such as in the model proposed by Cass. The four phases include:

Awareness – A woman at this stage becomes aware that her feelings are different than the heteronormative expectation in society.

Exploration – This phase involves active examination of non-heteronormative expectations. This might include the exploration of feelings for another woman or a relationship with another woman.

Deepening/commitment – This phase includes more clarity and understanding of one's sexual identity. Strong interest arises in lesbian culture.

Internalization/synthesis – This phase includes the acceptance of one's sexual identity as a part of her overall identity.

This model has a number of problems associated with it. Contrary to Butler's (1990) assertion that women should not be seen as an essential category with similar traits this model essentializes the idea of what it means to be a woman. Queer theory through a feminist lens aims to deconstruct binaries, and this model reinforces the binary of men and women as well as the binary of lesbians and gay men with the monolithic idea of lesbian culture. It is also a simplistic and relationship-centric model suggesting one idea of what it means to be a lesbian.

Furthermore, this model excludes transgender people, and does not include lesbians who have girlfriends who transition into a male.

Bisexual identity development model.

Not much attention has been given to the creation of models that explain the identity development of bisexual people (Diamond, 2005; Firestein, 2007; Rust, 2000, 2002; Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor, 1994). However, the most accepted model is from Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor (1994) which suggests that a bisexual identity is developed in a year-long process by progressing through four stages. The four stages include: initial confusion, finding and applying the labels, settling into the identity, and continued uncertainty. This model is simplistic in nature and does not begin to address the complex identity of bisexuals. Furthermore, it has not been supported by research. Diamond (2008b) compared the evidence for the simplistic models of bisexual identity development such as the Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor Model. Her evidence suggested that bisexuality is flexible and these models do not adequately explain the development of bisexual identity. Although, Diamond's (2008b) study was conducted only with females who were predominately White, it is the only longitudinal study that exists to study bisexuals over a period of ten years. There is limited research about bisexual identity and this is an area that warrants further exploration.

Gender and theories of its development.

Martin & Yonkin (2006) explain that gender was originally a linguistic term used to designate nouns as masculine, feminine, or neutral and was later adopted as a term that referred to the relationship between biological and social influences on male and female identities (p. 108). Martin & Yonkin (2006) explain, "Gender identity is known as the innate sense of being a man, woman, or other gender" (p.109). Whereas gender expression is the communication of

one's gender. Individuals are referred to as gender-congruent if their biological gender, gender identity, and gender expression are in agreement. Otherwise they are known as gender-variant (Butler, 1990; Fineberg, 1992; Foucault, 1978; Stryker, 2008).

Biological theories tend to be dichotomous; people are either male or female. Thus gender variance is a biological abnormality or serves an evolutionary purpose in response to over-population. Whereas psychoanalytic theory (Brannon, 2002; Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Chodorow, 1978; and Homey, 1939) suggests that people become gendered in childhood, and an individual with a transgender identity has an unsuccessful resolution of the Oedipus Complex or Electra Complex. Social learning theory (Brannon, 2002; Hardy, 1995; Mischel, 1996; Skinner, 1969) tends to suggest that gender-variant behavior is learned during childhood from others who also display gender-variant behavior. Cognitive-developmental theory (Kohlberg, 1981; Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Mallon, 1998) assumes that gender identity is developed through a series of stages: *gender awareness/identity*, *gender stability*, and *gender consistency*. According to cognitive-developmental theory, these stages are reached at developmental milestones (ages) during childhood and are based on what is observed in the child's environment. Children become cognitively aware that their gender expression is socially accepted or rejected from prominent figures in his/her life.

The theories of gender variance, discussed above, are ideas suggesting how gender is developed. They are somewhat simplistic and fail to acknowledge that gender is established through iterative performances and discourse (Butler, 1990). Understanding gender as a flexible construct and as performance is important in understanding gender identity of LGBTQ youth.

Modern Scholars of LGBTQ Identity Development

More modern scholars of sexual identity development (Savin-Williams, 1998, 2001,

2005; Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000) have suggested that these previous “cookie-cutter” models of sexual identity do not correctly articulate the various pathways in which youth come to understand and develop their sexual identity. Savin-Williams (1998) concluded that the age at which youth are “coming out” can begin in elementary school, “awareness of same-sex attractions has dropped from the onset of junior high to an average of third grade” (p. 16). This young age of coming out can be attributed to “recent visibility of homosexuality, ... the reality of a very vocal and extensive gay and lesbian culture, and the presence of homosexuality in their immediate social world” (Savin-Williams, 1998, p. 122). The idea that coming out is impacted by the visibility of homosexuality is important. However, it is not the only factor in youth coming out at earlier ages. All social constructs are paramount in youth coming out. For example, people may come out at a younger age because there is progressively more acceptance of gay people in terms of legal rights, at least in some states. For most young people, this immediate social world includes the schools they attend, mass media, awareness of political movements, as well as social media sites they visit on the Internet.

Savin-Williams (2005) criticizes both traditional theories of sexuality and theories of queer sexuality, suggesting that sexual identity labels are archaic due to the debate surrounding the definition of sexual orientation. This brings up the point made earlier that traditional lesbian models of identity do not include lesbians who have girlfriends who transition into boyfriends. This is a complicated situation and a single term or model does not adequately address a situation such as this. Savin-Williams (2005) explains that for the modern teenager, labels are a “thing of the past” and come with heavy burdens that most teens do not wish to carry with them. This is similar to Diamond’s (2008a) finding that most females do not like to select labels because it does not adequately describe their sexual feelings. In speaking about today’s gay teenager

Savin-Williams (2005) explains, “Their sexuality is not something that can easily be described, categorized, or understood apart from being part of their life in general. The notion of ‘gay’ as a noteworthy or identifying characteristic is being abandoned; it has lost definition” (p. 1). The notion of *gay* becoming extinct is a result of teens’ desires to not have to label themselves based on their sexual orientation/desires/behaviors. He further states:

Most young people see little need to link their sexuality to their personal identity, attitudes, values, politics, religion, or life philosophy. Some even see no need to link their sexuality to their sexual behavior and romantic lives. Most same-sex attracted young people engage in sexual activities with both sexes. (Savin-Williams, 2005, p. 7).

That is, labels and terms such as gay, lesbian, and bisexual do not adequately describe the sexual desires and sexual behaviors of LGBTQ youth. Furthermore, LGBTQ youth do not see their sexuality as a definitive factor of their identity.

Social Media and Identity Development

In 2000 *Out-Proud* and *Oasis Magazine* conducted one of the largest online surveys targeting the LGBT community aged 25 or younger. Out of the 6,872 respondents, two-thirds reported that being online helped them accept their sexual orientation; over one-third reported that being online was essential to this acceptance. 58 percent of males and 38 percent of females came out online prior to doing so in real life (Gross, 2007). boyd (2007) explains, “Social network sites are providing teens with a space to work out identity and status, make sense of cultural cues, and negotiate public life” (p. 2). Going online provides many individuals the opportunity to create their identities and shed the masks they wear in real life (Gabriel, 1995; Sundén, 2003), and it can also provide a supportive LGBT online

community.

Social Construction of Identity

The idea that identity construction is a social process involving more than just oneself is complementary to sociocultural theory (Moll, 1992; Wertsch, 1985; Vygotsky, 1978) in the field of developmental psychology. Sociocultural theory suggests that cognitive development takes place within social arenas and individual experience cannot be separated from the context of that social arena. Similarly, social constructionist theories of identity suggest that identity is constructed upon social interactions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) rather than discrete aspects of identity placed upon each other. That is identity is constructed socially; it is the intersection of different aspects of identity such as race, class, gender, and sexuality. Similarly, Gray (2009) explains the construction of identities as, “technosocial processes that entangle multiple sites and fields of power beyond the location of a solitary person” (p. 4). That is, identities are not constructed individually. They are impacted by powers, and are worked out in many different social arenas online and offline. One such social arena could include social media.

Minoritized Status and Discrimination

Unfortunately, even with great strides towards equality, sexuality remains an area of hostile debate in education and politics in particular. For example, the debate about same-sex marriage is heated debate in news media. Levitt et al (2009) explain that LGBTQ individuals “experience living in a context of painful reminders that one is seen as less than human by the government and public, and in which one’s life is frequently and publicly misrepresented to advance hostile political campaigns” (p. 67). In particular, it is a difficult time for LGBTQ youth to explore and construct their sexual identity because they have learned that an LGBTQ identity can be stigmatizing because of the inequity in equality that exist for LGBTQ people and the

discrimination that LGBTQ people face.

Discrimination has no boundaries and can begin as early as elementary school and continue throughout high school and adulthood (Baker, 2002). In 2011 the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) conducted a National School Climate Survey (N=8,584). In regards to safety and victimization GLSEN (2011) reported the following statistics about LGBTQ teens:

- Over 63 percent felt unsafe because of their sexual orientation, and nearly 44 percent because of their gender expression.
- More than 80 percent were verbally harassed in the past year because of their sexual orientation.
- Over 63 percent were verbally harassed in the past year because of their gender expression.
- More than one-third of the participants were physically harassed in the past year because of their sexual orientation, and more than one-fourth because of their gender expression.
- Over half experienced cyberbullying (via text message or Facebook posting) in the past year.

The authors of the GLSEN report (2011) stated, “Schools nationwide are hostile environments for a distressing number of LGBT students, the overwhelming majority of whom hear homophobic remarks and experience harassment or assault at school because of their sexual orientation or gender expression” (p. 5). Given this hostile environment, schools are not the ideal space for most teens to explore issues of gender and sexual identity. This research suggests that discrimination based on sexual orientation and sexual identity is rampant in U.S. schools.

LGBTQ students experience discrimination in the form of verbal, physical, and electronic harassment thus causing over half of LGBTQ students to feel unsafe at school.

Support Systems for LGBTQ Youth

Gay-Straight Alliances

Several national and state organizations that have responded to the needs of LGBTQ youth are the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) and the Gay-Straight Alliance Network (GSAN). An essential component of these organizations is to create safe environments within schools through the “safe schools” initiative. This initiative has helped to create more than 3,000 Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) across the country. Although this is a move in the right direction for creating safe spaces for queer youth and reducing bullying in schools, this number is minute compared to the number of schools there are in the country. GSAs are extracurricular groups in high schools that support and advocate for LGBT and questioning students. These groups include students of any sexual orientation, including heterosexuals. GSAs are student-led groups and faculty-sponsored groups, which aim to provide a safe and supportive space on school campuses for LGBTQ students and their straight allies (Griffin et al, 2003; Miceli, 2005). The primary purpose of GSAs is to create a safe, homophobia-free school environment and to offer support to LGBTQ students and those questioning their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Often times this is accomplished by GSA members helping to educate the rest of the student body about LGBT issues, participating in activism such as The Day of Silence, and advocating for non-discriminatory treatment of students who are, or are perceived to be, LGBT (Holmes & Cahill, 2003; Miceli, 2005). Baker (2002) explains that established GSAs help LGBT youth feel that they are not living in isolation and provide opportunities for these students to openly discuss the

trials and tribulations they are faced with in having to “resolve the conflict between who they are and what they are being told they should be” (p. 96). In schools with established GSAs, there tends to be less violence (GLSEN, 2011) and LGBTQ students have a safe social space to explore issues of gender and sexuality. GSAs are one of the few social resources available to LGBTQ youth, and unfortunately most schools do not have established GSAs.

It Gets Better Project

The *It Gets Better Project*, founded in 2010 by Dan Savage and Terry Miller, is a social media tool that was created in response to the recent onslaught of LGBTQ teen suicides. The project uses YouTube videos to reach LGBTQ youth and argues that circumstances will improve for them once they reach adulthood. One of the powerful components about this project is that people can access this site from anywhere, removing the need to seek out an established support system in the real world. With The It Gets Better Project, it is possible for users to seek a virtual support system, with new levels of discreetness and privacy. This opens up the door to potentially reaching many young people who lack the support systems needed to develop a positive LGBTQ identity.

Social Media/Social Networking

Although social media is comprised of a myriad of different structures (Twitter, Blogs, RSS News Feeds, Instagram, YouTube, etc.), this literature review examines social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook because these two sites are amongst some of the most popular forms of social media in media literature. This does not mean that other forms of social media should are not important, however they are beyond the scope and intent of this study.

As explained in Appendix A, the term social media and social networking will be used interchangeably. This section will define social media, briefly explain how sites such as

MySpace and Facebook work, and discuss how youth use MySpace and Facebook to construct identities.

Defining social media

Social network sites are defined by boyd and Ellison (2007) 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 by others within the system (p. 211). MySpace and Facebook are both social network community sites that possess these three characteristics.

Some of the research and data that is drawn upon in this study is based upon work done in a social networking site (MySpace) that has been supplanted by another more contemporary one (Facebook). However staying abreast of the fast changing social media is less important than how they are being used because this study is about social media usage, rather than a study of any particular networking entity. Both Facebook and MySpace launched in mid to early 2000 as a social interaction tool to facilitate the efficient connection and communication with other individuals (Facebook Fact Sheet, 2012; MySpace Press Room, 2011). Since the launch of these social media sites, millions of users have integrated and embraced these sites into their daily lives. As of December 2012, Facebook reported that there were 1.06 billion monthly active users, 618 million daily active users, and 680 million mobile monthly active users who utilize Facebook mobile products on their cell phones, iPods, and iPads (Tam, 2013). In essence, based on the number of active users, if Facebook were a country, it would be the third largest country in the world ranking larger than the United States, which has a population slightly more than 300 million.

Not as popular as Facebook, MySpace had over 100 million users by August 2006 and

was growing at a rate of over 500,000 members per week (Cashmore, 2006). While not all users of these social media sites are teens, boyd (2007) concludes “these sites developed significant cultural resonance amongst American teens in a short period of time” (p. 1). boyd (2007) adds “Teens often turn to sites like MySpace for entertainment; social voyeurism passes time while providing insight into society at large (p. 9). That is, social media has become a common past time for many teens in a short period of time.

Social media is changing the way young people conduct their social interactions, maintain their social lives, and construct their identities. Turkle (2011) explains how the obsession with social media is troubling because youth do not understand how to have face-to-face interactions and conversations, and they prefer conversations that take place through technology because they have control over the situation. People tend to expect more from technology than from each other, and deny full attention to each other in offline situations (Turkle, 2011). In essence, technology is creating a façade of empathy and interest, the illusion of friendship, and the idea that we never have to be alone (Turkle, 2011).

boyd (2007) suggests that social media sites are networks that possess four characteristics unlike face-to-face public life: persistence, searchability, replicability, and invisible audiences. She further argues “These properties fundamentally alter social dynamics, complicating the ways in which people interact” (p. 2). On the property of persistence, boyd (2007) argues that unlike face-to-face communication, social media “extends the period of existence of any speech act” because it is written and archived (p. 9). In terms of searchability, boyd (2007) suggests “finding one’s digital body online is just a matter of keystrokes”, and search tools can connect individuals with similar written and recorded identities and interests (p. 9). Replicability refers to social media’s ability to replicate public expressions without being able to distinguish the original from

the replicated (boyd, 2007). The most convoluted trait of social media is its invisible audience. boyd (2007) explains “it is virtually impossible to ascertain all those who might run across our expressions in networked publics” (p. 9). She continues that this trait is “further complicated by the other three properties, since our expression may be heard at a different time and place from when and where we originally spoke” (p.9). The dynamics of social media have opened up a whole new dimension of social interaction that was not imaginable over a decade ago by allowing for the editing of social conversations. Unlike face-to-face interactions, social media allows for individuals to edit their ideas and maintain control of conversations. In addition, social medias allows for the construction of an online-identity that may be different from an offline-identity.

Construction of Social Networks: Profiles, Friends, and Comments

Social network sites are constructed around three main components: profiles, friends, and comments. There are other common features within social network sites, however, it is these three – profiles, friends, and comments – that are most commonly used and made publicly visible (boyd, 2007; Zhao, 2008). These three features become the vehicle for online identity construction where an individual can “type oneself into being” (Sundén, 2003, p. 3).

Profiles are created by filling out forms through the social network site and include identifying information intended to capture an idea of the user’s personality. A variety of information can be included, or excluded, in a users’ profile such as: contact information, education and work affiliation, profile picture(s), activities and interests, etc. In essence, “the profile is where the performance of identity is choreographed” (Macintosh & Bryson, 2008, p. 137). These performances of identity can be made or public or private based on the sites privacy features and users preferences.

After the initial creation of a profile, a list of Friends is generated through the confirmation approval provided by the site. In other words, the social networking site asks the question, “Do you want to be my friend?,” and the user has the option of accepting or declining the invitation of friendship. Friends can be found through a supplied list of email addresses, through connections based on similar affiliations or interests, as well as through the searching of user profiles.

Once users are connected and a “Friend” status has been established, friends can post comments on each other’s pages. On MySpace this section is called “Comments by Friends”, and Facebook refers to this area as “The Wall”. Users can provide a status update, upload photos, check-in to a place, and do a variety of other things that allow for other users to make a comment. A comment on a friend’s wall can be a simple “like” or a lengthy paragraph with details. boyd (2007) argues, “comments are a form of cultural currency” (p. 4) where identity is constructed through multiple and complex negotiations and connections.

Profile, friends, and comments are the three major components of social network sites. It is through the profile, where people begin to construct their identity through performances. Friends are the people in which social interaction and negotiations through comments takes place.

Social Media and Youth Identity Construction

Scholars have suggested that gender is constructed through day-to-day and iterative interactions and performances (Butler, 1990; Fine, 1989, Hochschild 1989; Pascoe, 2007; Thorne 2002; West and Zimmerman 1987). boyd (2007) explains, “Teenagers must determine where they want to be situated within the social world they see and then attempt to garner the reactions

to their performances that match their vision” (p. 21-22). Social media has provided a new landscape for the construction of identities.

Although the social networking sites MySpace and Facebook do not provide the user anonymity, it provides a different realm than face-to-face interaction; often times a safer environment with an “invisible” audience that permits exploration. In particular, this online environment can be particularly inviting for the exploration and construction of LGBTQ youth identity. Russell (2002) elaborates, “The Internet has provided sexual minority youth with a safe place in which to explore identities, come out to one another, and tell their stories ... Such free spaces characterize the ‘virtual communities’ of sexual minority youth that have recently emerged, creating opportunities for the development of relationships and identities that are not supported in the other contexts of their lives” (p. 261). That is, offline social contexts may not be as safe for LGBTQ youth due to physical harassment; however, in online social context LGBTQ youth are free to explore their gender and sexuality without the worry of physical abuse. Furthermore, social media allows LGBTQ youth to explore their gender and sexuality with an invisible audience.

Summary

The literature related to queer theory, social media, and youth identity development of multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth is scarce, specifically with respect to understanding how social media can be used to positively impact the identity construction for LGBTQ youth in safe environments. Developing an understanding of how youth navigate their lives through social media as well as developing an understanding of positive youth identity construction in multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth inform the ways in which support systems, scholars, and activists reach out to these multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth.

This chapter provided a review of the literature that is pertinent to this study. Chapter three will provide a discussion about the methodology of this study. Chapter four will provide a detailed analysis of the findings and results of this study, and chapter five will provide recommendations for future studies as well as a summary of the study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Purpose and Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative study was to explore, understand, and document the multiple ways multiply marginalized Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and/or Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ) youth use social media as a tool for the construction of identities. Another purpose of this study was to establish a baseline description of how social media was being used at a particular point in time (November 2012- April 2013) by a specific self-identified population. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following guiding research question:

Do social media provide a safe space for multiply marginalized LGBTQ youth to express and explore issues of sexuality and gender?

Sub-questions that this study sought to explore and understand include:

- 1. What levels of engagement do multiply marginalized LGBTQ youth have with social media, such as Facebook?*
- 2. What levels of commitment do multiply marginalized LGBTQ youth have with social media such as Facebook?*
- 3. What types of activities do multiply marginalized LGBTQ youth most frequently perform on Facebook?*
- 4. What types of connection strategies do multiply marginalized LGBTQ youth use on Facebook?*

However, at the time of this study a reliable and validated instrument did not exist that measured these research question, so an instrument was created for the purposes of this study that was based on Junco's (2012) Social Media Frequency Survey as well as the Facebook intensity scale (FBI) used by Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe (2007). The survey instrument was designed so that

correlation was a possible analytical technique that could be conducted if the number of participants allowed. However, correlation was unnecessary due to the design of the instrument.

This chapter will focus on the methodology of this study. This chapter includes information regarding the research design method, identification of the target and sample population, instrumentation used to collect data, data collection methods, methods for data analysis and synthesis, in addition to ethical considerations, assumptions, and the limitations of the study.

Research Design

The research method is a quantitative study supported with survey research methodology. Gay, Mills, Geoffrey, & Airasian (2010) explain, “A survey is an instrument to collect data that describes one or more characteristics of a specific population” (p. 175). Previous research (Cooper, 1998; Turner, Ku, Rogers, Lindberg, Pleck, & Sonenstein, 1998; & Mustanski, 2001) has shown that online surveys are appropriate mechanisms for collecting data that is sensitive in nature from stigmatized populations such as LGBTQ youth. Some of the questions asked in this study could be considered sensitive in nature for youth, specifically questions regarding participants’ sexual orientation, sexual attraction, and gender expression. This study was also designed as an anonymous online quantitative survey study because of the numerous IRB issues surrounding the protection of minoritized under-age participants. It was important that participants not be required to have parental consent because this could pose a potential threat to participants who do not have a parent(s)/guardian(s) who is supportive of their identity or for participants who do not wish to disclose their sexual identity to their parent(s)/guardian. A waiver of parental consent was obtained from IRB because appropriate mechanisms such as anonymity and the creation of an online survey so that youth were not placed in unfamiliar settings with an unfamiliar adult were provided to protect the youth participants in this study.

With this in mind, participants responded to an anonymous online survey created through Qualtrics, a web-based software tool used to build survey instruments and collect data. Although no identifying information was collected from the participants, participants were assigned a unique code through Qualtrics so that individual participant responses could also be viewed and analyzed. Once surveys were completed, they were uploaded into Social Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), a data analysis program, for data analysis.

Target Population, Sample, and Participant Selection

For purposes of this study, it was of interest to study multiply marginalized LGBTQ youth between the ages of 13 and 17 who use social media. Specifically, multiply marginalized LGBTQ youth such as Hispanic/Latina/o LGBTQ youth were of interest because of the rapid increase in population of this group since the 2010 U.S. Census. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, approximately 16 percent of the population, about 50.5 million people, self-identified as being of Hispanic or Latino origin. The 2000 U.S. Census indicated that the Hispanic and Latino population was about 35.3 million, 13 percent of the population. This growth shows a 43 percent increase in the Hispanic and Latino population in a ten-year span, and was the fastest growing group reported in the 2010 U.S. Census. According to the data in this report, more than 75 percent of the Latina/o population lived in the West or South with over half of the Latina/o population living in Texas, California, or Florida. Due to the rapid rate of growth of the Hispanic and Latino population, there is a need for further research exploring this group. Given this study's focus is on LGBTQ youth, a purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990 & 2002) of LGBTQ participants were selected. Patton (1990, 2002) explains that purposeful sampling methods are used when the population being studied is difficult to locate, identify, or is marginalized by society. Participants were eligible for the study if they self-identified as:

- 1) Between the ages of 13 and 17,
- 2) Users of social media, and
- 3) Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and/or Queer/Questioning.

Participants were recruited from November 2012 – February 2013 through the Facebook pages² of various LGBTQ friendly organizations such as: PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), GSAs (Gay-Straight Alliances), GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network), It Get's Better Project, HRC (Human Rights Campaign), GLBTQ Centers, and Rio Grande Adelante². Due to a low response rate, in late March 2013 an amendment to use a recruitment flyer was submitted to IRB and approved. In March 2013, a recruitment flyer (Appendix C) was also distributed to recruit potential participants. The recruitment flyer was given to various LGBTQ friendly organizations such as: PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), GSAs (Gay-Straight Alliances), GLBTQ Centers, a university sexual and gender diversity center, as well as a student LGBTQ group at a university. These organizations were selected because of their support towards LGBTQ research and their connections to reach LGBTQ youth in the community.

The researcher had no face-to-face contact with any participants or potential participants at any point in time during this study. All recruitment for the study took place online through organization's Facebook pages or offline via advertisement flyers with adult leaders (over 18 years of age) of various organizations.

² PFLAG is a national non-profit organization with over 200,000 members and supporters and over 350 affiliates in the United States. GSAs are student-led and faculty-sponsored organizations that aim to create a safe and supportive environment for LGBT students and their straight allies. GLBTQ Centers are non-profit community centers that support LGBTQ individuals of all ages. These organizations were selected because of their accessibility and willingness to work with LGBTQ youth and support research about LGBTQ youth.

In this exploratory research study, the limitations imposed by IRB and time constraints for collecting data, resulted in a small but significant sample size considering the nascent field of study. A total of 31 respondents began the survey, 19 of whom finished the survey with at least 27 out of 28 questions completed. One respondent identified as straight and was excluded in data analysis along with the 11 respondents who did not complete the survey. A total of 19 (N = 19) participants ranging in age from 14-17 years of age who self-identified as LGBTQ are represented in the study's sample population. The selected participants were willing and accessible to articulate their personal experience about the specific phenomenon being studied by answering a brief online survey. Online data collection ensured the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. The survey took participants approximately 10-20 minutes to complete. Surveys were administered beginning in November 2012, following IRB approval, and concluded in April 2013.

Instrumentation

At the time of this study a reliable and validated instrument did not exist that measured multiply marginalized LGBTQ youth's levels of engagement with social media. Therefore, the researcher created an instrument for the purposes of this study. The instrument was based on Junco's (2012) Social Media Frequency Survey as well as the Facebook intensity scale (FBI) used by Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe (2007).

Data collected from the survey includes numerical data based on the Likert-type rating scales with operationally defined categories of accessibility to social media, frequency of activities within social media, connection strategies used within social media, levels of commitment to social media, feelings of expressive freedom within a safe space. Demographic information was obtained through questions that focus on the participants' age, gender, race,

geographic location, sexual attraction, sexual orientation, and gender expression. The survey can be found in Appendix B. Additionally, a chart with survey questions and their categorizations along with a visual representation can be found in the table at the end of the instrumentation section below. A design with these groupings was developed because it provided potential opportunities for correlational studies. However, due to the smaller response, correlation was not an appropriate mathematical technique for data analysis. Nevertheless, the study design was created so that if replicated, and the sample size is statistically significant, correlation becomes a valuable addition to this study.

Part One: Demographic Measures

The purpose of part one was to collect demographic information from the participants such as age, gender/gender identity, geographic location, race, sexual attraction, and sexual identity. Demographic questions were created by the researcher.

Age. Age was measured as an interval variable. The minimum age choice offered was 13 years old; the maximum was 17 years old.

Gender/Gender Identity. Gender was measured as a nominal variable. The question about gender was asked in the following manner: “*Do you consider yourself...*”. The answer choices offered included: 1) *Female*, 2) *Male*, 3) *Transgender (a gender other than the one assigned to you at birth)*, and 4) *Other*.

Geographic Location. Geographic location was measured as a nominal variable. Participants were asked open-ended questions about what state, county, and city they currently reside in.

Ethnicity and Race. Ethnicity and race were measured as a nominal variable. The answer choices offered included: 1) *African-American*, 2) *Asian-Pacific Islander*, 3)

Hispanic/Latino, 4) Native American, 5) White, 6) White, non-Hispanic, and 7) Other. Respondents could only select one term.

Sexuality. Sexuality was measured as a nominal variable. Participants were asked, “*Are you sexually attracted to...*”. Answer choices included: 1) *females*, 2) *males*, 3) *both females and males*, 4) *gender doesn’t matter to me*, 5) *none of the above*. Participants were also asked, “*Do you consider yourself to be...*”. Answer choices included: 1) *Bisexual*, 2) *Gay*, 3) *Lesbian*, 4) *Queer*, 5) *Straight*, 6) *I don’t label myself*, 7) *Not sure*, and 8) *None of the above*.

Part Two: Accessibility

The purpose of part two was to better understand participants’ access to social media. This was determined by the following questions:

1. *Do you have access to a computer for personal use?*
2. *Do you have a smartphone, such as an iPhone, Android or Blackberry?*
3. *Do you own a tablet device, such as an iPad, Xoom, Nook, or Kindle?*
4. *Have you used a social media site such as Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube in the past two weeks?*
5. *Which of the following social media do you use at least once a week? (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, MySpace, YouTube, Blogs, RSS news feeds, Flickr/Photobucket, Tumblr, and/or Instagram)*

In questions one through four participants were provided a choice of either “*Yes*” or “*No*” to select as their answer. Question five was presented as a menu of choices where participants could select the social media they had used at least once a week.

Part Three: Frequency of Activities

The intent of this section was to better understand what types of social media participants were engaged in and how frequently they performed specific activities within Facebook.

Therefore, the questions from Junco's (2012) Frequency of Social Media Survey were used. The activities were categorized into four sub-scales of *frequency of activities* on Facebook: *communication with others*, *connection strategies*, *engagement with photos and/or videos*, and *engagement with games*. The questions asked in these sections include:

Communication with others.

1. On Facebook, how frequently do you post status updates?
2. On Facebook, how frequently do you share links?
3. On Facebook, how frequently do you send private messages?
4. On Facebook, how frequently do you comment on status, wall posts, pictures, etc.?
5. On Facebook, how frequently do you chat on Facebook chat?
6. On Facebook, how frequently do you create or RSVP to events?

Connection strategies.

7. On Facebook, how frequently do you check to see what someone is up to?

Engagement with photos/videos.

8. On Facebook, how frequently do you post photos?
9. On Facebook, how frequently do you tag photos?
10. On Facebook, how frequently do you view photos?
11. On Facebook, how frequently do you post videos?
12. On Facebook, how frequently do you tag videos?
13. On Facebook, how frequently do you view videos?

Engagement with games.

14. On Facebook, how frequently do you play games?

A five-point Likert-type scale was presented to participants for all the questions in this section. The scale included: Very frequently (100 percent of the time), Somewhat frequently (75 percent of the time), Sometimes (50 percent of the time), Rarely (25 percent of the time), and Never (0 percent of the time). Respondents were required to select an answer in order to proceed to the next section.

Part Four: Connection Strategies

Part four was partially derived from items reported in Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe (2007), with other items created by the researcher. This part was broken down into two subscales, *learn about new people scale* and *explore new relationships scale*. These items were asked in a series of four-point agree/disagree Likert-type scale items. Scales ranges were from: Strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, agree, and strongly agree. The items included for the *learn about new people scale* were:

1. I have used Facebook to check out someone I met socially.
2. I use Facebook to learn more about people in my classes.
3. I use Facebook to learn more about people living near me.

The items included for the *explore new relationships scale* were:

1. I use social media, such as Facebook, to help explore friendships/relationships with people that I feel I can connect with.
2. I use Facebook to meet new people.

These items specifically sought to understand at what level participants used Facebook to initiate connections and to seek information about other people.

Part Five: Commitment to Social Media

The purpose of this section was to begin to understand the types of commitments that Latina/o LGBTQ youth have to social media. All questions in this section were derived from items reported in Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe (2007). The question about the number of Facebook friends was presented to respondents in the form of a menu from which respondents selected their answers. Answer choices for this item included: less than 50, 51-100, 101-150, 151-200, 201-250, 251-300, 301-350, 351-400, and more than 400. Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe (2007) explain that this question about Facebook friends can be asked as either an open-ended question or with the use of an ordinal scale such as the one selected for this study. Furthermore, this particular question was not included in the *level of commitment scale* during analysis, but was analysed separately. All other items were asked in a series of four-point agree/disagree Likert-type scale items and were used in the *level of commitment scale*. Scale ranges were from: Strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, agree, and strongly agree. The items included were:

1. Facebook is a part of my everyday activity.
2. I am proud to tell people I am on Facebook.
3. Facebook has become part of my daily routine.
4. I feel out of touch when I haven't logged into Facebook for a while.
5. I feel I am part of the Facebook community.
6. I would be sorry if Facebook shut down.
7. Approximately how many Facebook friends do you have?

Items in this section were asked to better understand the types of commitments participants had with Facebook. Commitments could include emotional connection, social capital, sense of pride, and sense of belonging.

Part Six: Expressive Freedom in an Online Space

The items in this section were asked to better understand what kind of space Facebook provided for Latina/o LGBTQ youth. This section also served as a means to better understand comparisons between Latina/o LGBTQ youth's online and offline experiences in terms of comfortably expressing themselves with regards to issues of gender and sexuality. With the exception of one open-ended item (question four below), the items in this section appeared to respondents in the form of four-point agree/disagree Likert-type scale items. Scale ranges were from: Strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, agree, and strongly agree. These items created the *comfort online scale* and included:

1. I am comfortable disclosing information about my personal life through social media such as Facebook.
2. When compared to off-line, face-to-face interactions, I feel social media allows me to explore/express my gender and sexuality in a comfortable space.
3. I am more at ease when communicating through social media than I am in face-to-face settings.
4. Compare the conversations you have had with Facebook friends to conversations you have had off-line. Which conversations are more supportive? Why?

A separate question was also asked in order to better understand participants' willingness to express themselves safely in online spaces. The question was, "When using social media I have been a victim of cyberbullying." Participants could disagree/agree with the same four-point Likert-type scale indicated above.

The table below (Table 1) provides a grouping of scales created and questions contained within each of the scales. It also contains information about the origin of the questions.

Table 1: Survey Questions and Categories

| Measurement Of: | Survey Question(s) |
|------------------------------|---|
| Demographic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age* • Race* • Gender* • Geographic location* • Sexual attraction/sexual orientation* |
| Accessibility | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have access to a computer for personal use?* • Do you have a smartphone, such as an iPhone, Android or Blackberry?* • Do you own a tablet device, such as an iPad, Xoom, Nook, or Kindle?* |
| Frequency of Activity | <p>Any social media use</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How often do you visit social media sites?* • Have you used a social media site such as Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube in the past two weeks?* • Which of the following social media do you use at least once a week? (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, MySpace, YouTube, Blogs, RSS news feeds, Flickr/Photobucket, Tumblr, Instagram)* <p>Facebook activity use</p> <p><i>Communicating with others:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On Facebook, how frequently do you post status updates?*** • On Facebook, how frequently do you share links?*** • On Facebook, how frequently do you send private messages?*** • On Facebook, how frequently do you comment on status, wall posts, pictures, etc.?*** • On Facebook, how frequently do you chat on Facebook chat?*** • On Facebook, how frequently do you create or RSVP to events?*** <p><i>Connection strategy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On Facebook, how frequently do you check to see what someone is up to?*** <p><i>Photos/Videos</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On Facebook, how frequently do you post photos?*** • On Facebook, how frequently do you tag photos?*** • On Facebook, how frequently do you view photos?*** • On Facebook, how frequently do you post videos?*** • On Facebook, how frequently do you tag videos?*** • On Facebook, how frequently do you view videos?*** <p><i>Engagement</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On Facebook, how frequently do you play games? ** |
| Connection strategies | <p>Learn about new people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have used Facebook to check out someone I met socially*** • I use Facebook to learn more about people in my classes*** • I use Facebook to learn more about people living near me*** <p>Explore new relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I use Facebook to meet new people*** • I use social media, such as Facebook, to help explore |

| Measurement Of: | Survey Question(s) |
|--|---|
| | friendships/relationships with people that I feel I can connect with* |
| Commitment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook is a part of my everyday activity*** • I am proud to tell people I am on Facebook*** • Facebook has become part of my daily routine*** • I feel out of touch when I haven't logged into Facebook for awhile*** • I feel I am part of the Facebook community*** • I would be sorry if Facebook shut down*** • Approximately how many Facebook friends do you have*** |
| Expressive freedom in Online Spaces | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am comfortable disclosing information about my personal life through social media such as Facebook* • When compared to off-line, face-to-face interactions, I feel social media allows me to explore/express my gender and sexuality in a comfortable space* • I am more at ease when communicating through social media than I am in face-to-face settings* • Compare the conversations you have had with Facebook friends to conversations you have had off-line. Which conversations are more supportive? Why?* • When using social media I have been a victim of cyberbullying* |
| <p>*Denotes a question created by this researcher.</p> <p>** Denotes a question taken from Junco (2012) Facebook frequency survey.</p> <p>*** Denotes a question taken from Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe (2007).</p> | |

A visual representation to further explain how these categories lead to the description of participants and understanding of participants' perceptions of safety within social media is provided below in figure 1.

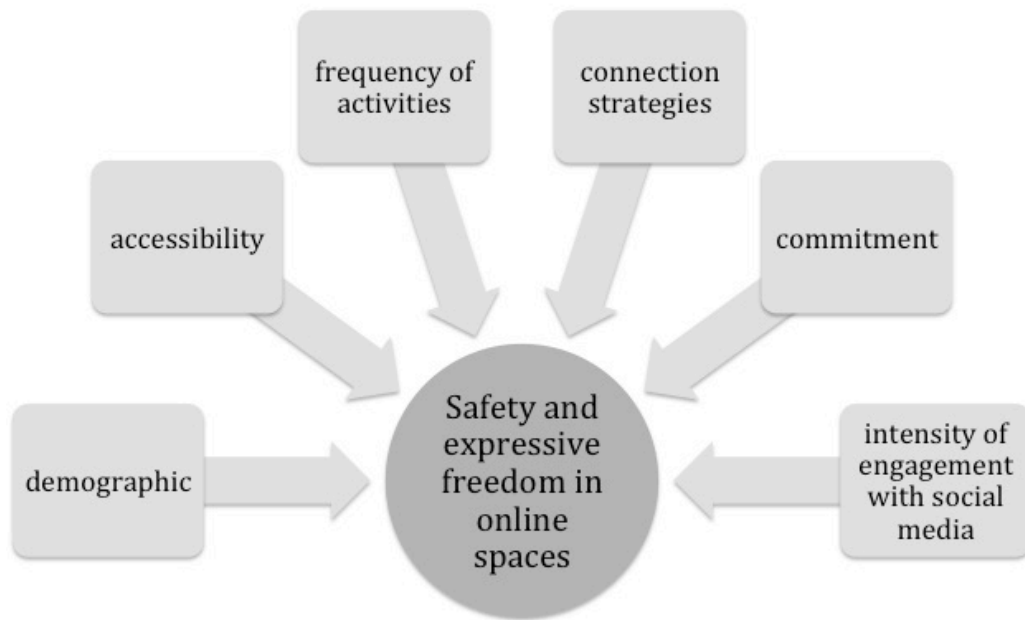


Figure 1: Social Media Safety and Engagement Model

Contextual variables such as demographic data, accessibility, frequency of activities, connection strategies, levels of commitment, and intensity of engagement with social media, were used to better understand participants' levels of comfort in online spaces. These variables are not intended to determine a causal relationship but rather determine, describe, and explain to what degree participants are engaged with social media. Furthermore, this data was intended to serve as a baseline description for what a specific self-identified population was doing with social media at specified point in time (November, 2012 – April, 2013). Future studies utilizing this instrument could be correlational in nature assuming that the number of participants was significant.

Research Procedures

Since the survey presents questions about topics that participants may consider sensitive topics (sexual orientation, sexual identity, gender identity, and gender expression), procedures

were used to assure the protection, anonymity, and confidentiality of participants. These procedures included: waiving parental consent, using an online survey to collect data, not asking participants identifying questions.

The survey was created through Qualtrics, a web-based software tool. After creation, Qualtrics provided a unique web link to be used to access the survey. Participants accessed the survey through Facebook, a website, and/or a QR code included on fliers. Facebook posting on LGBTQ friendly Facebook pages which included: PFLAGs, GSAs, Rio Grande Adelante, GLBTQ Centers, HRC, It Get's Better Project, and Coalition for Queer Youth. The Facebook posting contained a hyperlink to the online survey setup through Qualtrics. Additionally, an advertisement was provided to LGBTQ friendly organizations to recruit participants. The advertisement provided the direct link to the survey created through Qualtrics, a link to a webpage that describes the study and contains a hyperlink to the online survey, as well as a QR code that links directly to the online survey.

At the completion of the survey, participants were given the option to enter a drawing for one of two \$50 iTunes gift cards with the intent to increase the rate of participation and completion. Participants who chose to participate in the drawing provided their email address at the conclusion of the survey. Email addresses were not linked with survey responses. A random drawing was conducted after data collection ended, and winning participants were emailed a digital \$50 iTunes gift card.

This research study was a quantitative study design supported with online survey research methodology. The procedures in this study were designed to adhere to the IRB protocols of studying under-age, multiply minoritized LGBTQ people while maintaining a high quality study

about a specific population and their use of social media at a specific point in time (November 2012 – April 2013) that had yet to be fully explored and documented.

Data Analysis

Appropriate descriptive data analyses techniques were used to understand and document the ways LGBTQ youth use social media and to describe the levels of engagement with social media that they possess. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following guiding research questions:

- 1. Do social media provide a safe space for multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth to express and explore issues of sexuality and gender?*
- 2. What levels of engagement do multiply minoritized LGBTQ have with social media, such as Facebook?*
- 3. What levels of commitment do multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth have with social media such as Facebook?*
- 4. What types of activities do multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth most frequently perform on Facebook?*
- 5. What types of connection strategies do multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth use on Facebook?*

Data was downloaded directly from Qualtrics as an SPSS file and analyzed using SPSS 18 statistical software. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistical methods to elucidate the demographic characteristics of the sample as well as their use of social media. Additional analysis was performed using SPSS software to calculate ANOVA and measurements of reliability. Tables and charts were generated using SPSS software to discuss findings. Results of these analyses will be discussed in the next chapter.

Ethical Considerations

Participants within my study were treated fairly and ethically by ensuring confidentiality and minimizing harm and by having no interaction with them and maintaining anonymity in survey responses. Additionally, the risks and benefits of this study were presented to the participants in a manner that gave them the fair opportunity to choose whether or not to participate in the study.

There were no anticipated risks for participating in this study. The only known risk was disclosure of participants' identity to someone who may not be supportive of their sexual orientation and/or gender expression. However, waiving parental consent and providing an online survey that was completely anonymous addressed this risk.

For many LGBTQ youth, their own families are places where violence and bullying are central to their life experiences (Ryan, 2009). This means that requiring parental consent for their involvement in a research study is not reasonable and could result in harm to the participant. According to The Code of Federal Regulations (45 CFR 46.408-c), in addition to the provisions for waiver contained in §46.116 of subpart A, if the IRB determines that a research protocol is designed for conditions or for a subject population for which parental or guardian permission is not a reasonable requirement to protect the subjects (for example, neglected or abused children), it may waive the consent requirements in Subpart A of this part and paragraph (b) of this section, provided an appropriate mechanism for protecting the children who will participate as subjects in the research is substituted, and provided further that the waiver is not inconsistent with federal, state, or local law. Mechanisms for protecting the participants included: anonymity of willing participants, providing a list of resources for the participants

(should they need them), and creation of an online survey so that youth participants are not placed in unfamiliar setting with unknown adults.

Hillier, Mitchell, & Ybarra (2012) in the article “The Internet as a Safety Net: Findings From a Series of Online Focus Groups with LGB and Non-LGB Young People in the United States” in the *Journal of LGBT Youth* confronted the same issue of obtaining parental consent from members of special populations such as LGBTQ youth. Hillier, Mitchell, & Ybarra (2012) resolved this issue by obtaining a waiver of parental consent from the Chesapeake Institutional Review Board by emphasizing that “It is possible that obtaining consent from a parent may have inadvertently revealed to parents a young person’s sexual orientation or gender identity” (p. 227). Likewise, this research study obtained a waiver of parental consent from the University of Texas at El Paso Institutional Review Board.

The survey was offered in English and Spanish, however all participants took the survey in English. The survey began with a consent page that described the purpose of the study, voluntary nature of the study, confidentiality, possible risks, and consent to participate in the study. It was made clear that completion and submission of the survey indicated the individuals’ voluntary intent to participate in this study. Participants were also informed that they could quit the survey if they desired. After consent, participants were provided with a contact list of regional, state and national resources/facilities in case the need to seek help arose due to taking this survey. A list of resources is provided in Appendix D.

Assumptions

As in any research study, it is acknowledged that certain assumption exist, which guided the nature and interpretation of this study. The initial assumption is that there are no single

explanations for human behavior and that multiple realities can exist in any situation (Creswell, 2007).

The second assumption made is that social media provide Latina/o LGBTQ youth a safe place to work out identity and negotiate public life through written and created performances. This assumption is based on findings of previous research conducted by boyd (2007) who suggested social media provide teens with an online space to explore and express their gender and sexuality through performance and written text.

Limitations

Limitations refer to restrictions in the study that are beyond the researchers control. Based on the research design and the assumptions for this study, the following limitations have been identified. Rudestam & Newton (2007) explain that the method itself may be a limitation of the study. Specifically, in this study, the participants were required to self-report in the surveys, which limited the opportunities to perform further confirmation of the participant assertions. Subsequently, the initial limitation was that data are dependent upon participants' memories, articulation skills, willingness to reveal their personal experiences, and truthfulness, which cannot be confirmed.

A second limitation for this research study is associated with the notion of the method of purposeful sampling within a specific setting on the basis of identifying as LGBTQ. This limitation leads to the understanding that the research findings of this study may not be generalizable to a larger population. It is also subject to participants own interpretation of the terminology, not an insignificant issue in light of the power implications and controversy associated with some of the terms. For example, a female who is attracted to another female may have identified as lesbian, queer, or lesbian.

The third limitation associated with this proposed research design is associated with the instrument of data collection. At the time of the study a known validated instrument did not exist could be used to collect data for the purposes of this study. Therefore an instrument was derived and modified from two previously validated instruments. The reliability of the instrument created for this study was statistically tested and found to be reliable. This information is presented in chapter four.

Another limitation of this research study is associated with working with a protected class: LGBTQ adolescents between the ages of 14-17. Therefore, there were ethical implications that had to be addressed in the study design, and that were considered by the IRB in their approval process. The University of Texas at El Paso Institutional Review Board (IRB) advised that no contact should be made with the participants. No contact made with the participants limits study design and eliminates qualitative approaches. Therefore, a quantitative study utilizing online survey research methods was developed. Although survey research seeks to collect data to describe characteristics of a population, a more in-depth approach such as interviewing was initially desired.

The method of recruitment was a limitation of this study. Because recruitment took place via Facebook pages and posting of advertisements in LGBTQ organizations, only participants affiliated with these organizations had first-hand knowledge about the recruitment of the study. It is assumed that participants with no affiliation to the LGBTQ organizations were recruited through snowball sampling. Methods of purposeful and snowball sampling through web recruitment are often used to select participants who are hard to identify because they are at risk for personal harm (Nardi, 2003).

The small sample size of this study was another limitation. The design of the study was

structured with the anticipation that 200 individuals would participate. For this reason, categories of grouping variables were built into the survey instrument. Due to the IRB approval limitations mentioned earlier and the six-month approval time provided to collect data for the study, a participant sample size resulted in 19 participant completers (a 20th participant was eliminated because they self-identified as not LGBTQ). The balance between IRB protocol and a larger sample size was negotiated. This limitation leads to issues restricting the generalizability of the research findings. However, in an exploratory study of this kind in a nascent field with limited literature on this population, even a small sample size is significant.

Summary

This chapter presented the methodology, research design, sample population, instrumentation, data analysis as well as the procedures for this study, researcher assumptions, and limitations to this study. The methodology of this study was designed with the intention of answering the guiding research question: *Do social media provide a safe space for multiply marginalized LGBTQ youth to express and explore issues of sexuality and gender?* And sub-questions mentioned earlier.

Chapter 4- Research Findings and Analysis

Introduction

This study was conducted in order to explore, understand, and document the multiple ways multiply marginalized Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and/or Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ) youth use social media. It is a baseline study that looks at how social media was being used at a particular moment in time (November 2012 – April 2013) by LGBTQ youth. The following guiding research question was addressed in this study:

Do social media provide a safe space for multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth to express and explore issues of sexuality and gender?

Sub-questions that this study sought to explore include:

- 1. What levels of engagement do multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth have with social media such as Facebook?*
- 2. What levels of commitment do multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth have with social media such as Facebook?*
- 3. What types of activities do multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth most frequently perform on Facebook?*
- 4. What types of connection strategies do multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth use on Facebook?*

This chapter includes a discussion about the research findings and analysis of my study, which includes descriptive analytical information, demographic information about the participants, the frequency of survey items, as well as the reliability for each scale of the survey instrument.

Results

Participant Demographics

A total of 31 individuals accessed the online survey that was conducted through Qualtrics during the time of November 2012 through April 2013. Eleven participants did not complete the survey, so they were excluded from the study. These eleven participants were excluded from the final data analysis since they did not complete a significant percentage of the survey. In order to be included in the final data analysis, participants had to have completed 27 out of 28 questions, only allowing for omission of the open-ended question. Additionally, one participant self-identified as being straight and was also excluded from final data analysis, since this study focused on LGBTQ youth. The end result was a total of 19 participants (N = 19) who self-identified as LGBTQ youth and who were users of social media.

Age.

Although the ages for eligible participants included the ages of 13-17, only participants between 14-17 participated in this study. The table below (Table 2) shows the frequency of ages represented in this study. Over half the participants in this study were 17 years old.

Table 2: Age of Participants

| Age | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------------|-----------|---------|
| 13 | 0 | 0 |
| 14 | 1 | 5.3 |
| 15 | 3 | 15.8 |
| 16 | 5 | 26.3 |
| 17 | 10 | 52.6 |
| <i>Note.</i> N = 19. | | |

Race/Ethnicity.

Close to two-thirds, 63.2 percent, of the participants in this study self-identified as a minority (not White). In particular, 36.8 percent of the participants self-identified as Hispanic/Latina/o. Table 3 provides an overview of the race/ethnic backgrounds of the participants in this study.

Table 3: Race/Ethnicity of Participants.

| Race/Ethnicity | Frequency | Percent |
|---|------------------|----------------|
| African American | 1 | 5.3 |
| Asian-Pacific Islander | 2 | 10.6 |
| Hispanic/Latino | 7 | 36.8 |
| Native American | 1 | 5.3 |
| White or White non-Hispanic | 7 | 36.8 |
| Other | 1 | 5.3 |
| <i>Note.</i> If participants selected <i>Other</i> there was not an option for them to explain what <i>Other</i> meant. N = 19. | | |

There were identical numbers of White and Latina/o youth participants in this study. However, the combined number of minority youth (N = 12) was larger than the White youth (N = 7) participants in this study.

Gender.

Participants had the option of selecting *female*, *male*, *transgender*, or *other* as the gender in which they identify. Table 4 shows a breakdown of the participants' gender identification. A total of 7 participants, 36.8 percent, identified as female. A total of 9 participants, 47.4 percent, identified as male. A total of 2, 10.5 percent, identified as transgender. One participant, 5.25 percent, identified *other* as their gender.

Table 4: Gender of Participants

| Gender | Frequency | Percent |
|---|-----------|---------|
| Female | 7 | 36.8 |
| Male | 9 | 47.4 |
| Transgender (a gender other than the one assigned to you at birth) | 2 | 10.5 |
| Other | 1 | 5.3 |
| <i>Note.</i> If participants selected <i>Other</i> there was not an option for them to explain what <i>Other</i> meant. N = 19. | | |

Sexuality.

The question about sexuality was presented to participants in the following manner, “Do you consider yourself...”. Participants had the options of selecting one of the following choices: *Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, I don’t label myself, Not sure, or none of the above.* Table 5 below displays the participants’ sexuality at the time of completing the survey.

Table 5: Sexuality of Participants

| Sexuality | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------------|-----------|---------|
| Bisexual | 1 | 5.3 |
| Gay | 8 | 42.1 |
| Lesbian | 3 | 15.8 |
| Queer | 1 | 5.3 |
| I don't label myself | 2 | 10.5 |
| Not sure | 3 | 15.8 |
| None of the above | 1 | 5.3 |
| <i>Note.</i> N = 19. | | |

One participant identified as bisexual, eight participants identified as gay, three participants identified as lesbian, one identified as queer, two participants do not label themselves, three participants were unsure of their sexuality, and one participant selected the option of none of the above to describe their sexuality.

Geographic Location.

Participants lived in various geographic locations. However, about one third, 31.6 percent, of the participants reported living in Texas. The geographic location of participants can be seen below in Table 6.

Table 6: Geographic Location of Participants

| State | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Ukraine (Dnepropetrovsk) | 1 | 5.3 |
| California | 2 | 10.6 |
| Florida | 2 | 10.6 |
| Kentucky | 1 | 5.3 |
| Maine | 1 | 5.3 |
| Michigan | 1 | 5.3 |
| New Jersey | 1 | 5.3 |
| New Mexico | 1 | 5.3 |
| Ohio | 1 | 5.3 |
| South Carolina | 1 | 5.3 |
| Texas | 6 | 31.5 |
| Washington state | 1 | 5.3 |

Accessibility

Since this study is focused around social media, it was of interest to understand participants' access to social media, what tools participants used to connect to social media, if they had recently used social media, and what social media they had recently utilized. To determine accessibility, the following questions were asked:

6. *Do you have access to a computer for personal use?*
7. *Do you have a smartphone, such as an iPhone, Android or Blackberry?*
8. *Do you own a tablet device, such as an iPad, Xoom, Nook, or Kindle?*

9. *Have you used a social media site such as Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube in the past two weeks?*

10. *Which of the following social media do you use at least once a week? (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, MySpace, YouTube, Blogs, RSS news feeds, Flickr/Photobucket, Tumblr, and/or Instagram)*

Answers to questions one through four are reported below in Table 7.

Table 7: Accessibility

| Question | Yes Frequency (%) | No Frequency (%) |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Do you have access to a computer for personal use? | 17 (89.5%) | 2 (10.5%) |
| Do you have a smartphone, such as an iPhone, Android or Blackberry? | 9 (47.4%) | 10 (52.6%) |
| Do you own a tablet device, such as an iPad, Xoom, Nook, or Kindle? | 8 (42.1%) | 11 (57.9%) |
| Have you used a social media site such as Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube in the past two weeks? | 19 (100%) | 0 (0%) |

The results indicate that participants believed they had adequate access to social media. Furthermore, 100 percent of the participants had used a social media site within the last two weeks. Although this is a high rate, it is not surprising because this survey was conducted online and one of the recruitment techniques was through Facebook pages.

In terms of what types of social media teens are accessing (question five above), the graph below (Figure 2) displays social media that participants use at least once a week.

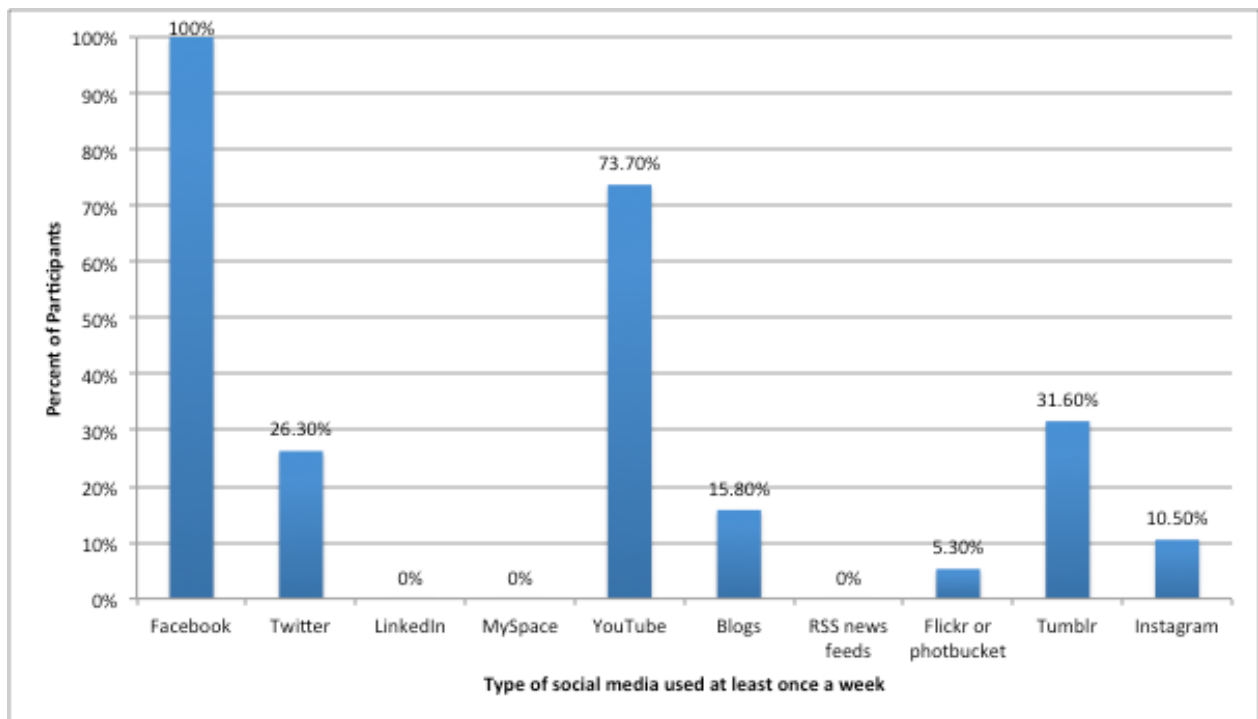


Figure 2: Types of Social Media Used at Least Once a Week

The most popular social media amongst participants in this study is Facebook, which 100 percent of participants reported that they used at least once a week. YouTube was the next most popular social media amongst participants, used by nearly three fourths of the participants. Less than a third of participants used Tumblr and Twitter once a week. Interestingly, none of the participants reported using MySpace at least once a week. However, this is not surprising given the rapidly changing and emerging field of technology and new media. Dudi (2013) reinforces this finding by explaining “Facebook overtook MySpace on April 19, 2008 and since those times user base decreased for MySpace” (p. 52). Furthermore, studies addressing MySpace began to diminish in 2008-2009.

Frequency of Activity Scale and Reliability

A better understanding of the types of activities and frequency of activities used within Facebook was desired. Therefore, the questions from Junco’s (2012) Frequency of Social Media

Survey were used. A reliability test, Cronbach's alpha, was conducted to estimate the internal consistency of the 14-item frequency of Facebook activity scale. The coefficient alpha, also called Cronbach's alpha, for the scale was .87, indicating internal consistency among the items on the scale. This is similar to Junco's (2012) frequency of Facebook use scale that had a Cronbach's alpha of .80 with a sample size of 2,368 ($N = 2,368$). In this study, the means of the individual items ranged from 2.42 to 4.47, with a mean on the total scale of 3.47 ($SD = .60$). In comparing minority LGBTQ youth to White LGBTQ youth there was not a significant difference in this scale. The mean of the *frequency of Facebook activity scales* for minority LGBTQ youth was 3.55 ($SD = .55$) compared to the mean of White LGBTQ youth of 3.33 ($SD = .71$). The mean and standard deviation of the items of the frequency of Facebook activity scale for all participants are provided in Table 8 below.

Table 8: The mean and standard deviation of the "frequency of Facebook activity scale"

| Item | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|------|----------------|
| How frequently do you perform the following activities when you are on Facebook?-Playing games (Farmville, MafiaWars, etc.) | 4.47 | .905 |
| How frequently do you perform the following activities when you are on Facebook?-Posting status updates | 3.42 | .961 |
| How frequently do you perform the following activities when you are on Facebook?-Sharing links | 3.42 | 1.121 |
| How frequently do you perform the following activities when you are on Facebook?-Sending private messages | 2.74 | 1.195 |
| How frequently do you perform the following activities when you are on Facebook?-Commenting (on statuses, wall posts, pictures, etc.) | 2.95 | 1.026 |
| How frequently do you perform the following activities when you are on Facebook?-Chatting on Facebook chat | 2.79 | 1.134 |
| How frequently do you perform the following activities when you are on Facebook?-Checking to see what someone is up to | 2.84 | 1.119 |

| Item | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--|------|----------------|
| How frequently do you perform the following activities when you are on Facebook?-Creating or RSVP'ing to events | 4.21 | .855 |
| How frequently do you perform the following activities when you are on Facebook?-Posting photos | 3.37 | .895 |
| How frequently do you perform the following activities when you are on Facebook?-Tagging photos | 3.84 | .898 |
| How frequently do you perform the following activities when you are on Facebook?-Viewing photos | 2.42 | 1.071 |
| How frequently do you perform the following activities when you are on Facebook?-Posting videos | 4.32 | .820 |
| How frequently do you perform the following activities when you are on Facebook?-Tagging videos | 4.42 | .769 |
| How frequently do you perform the following activities when you are on Facebook?-Viewing videos | 3.37 | 1.165 |
| Note: These items were presented on a five-point Likert-type scale with the following scale Very frequently-100% of the time (1), Somewhat frequently-75% of the time (2), Sometimes- 50% of the time (3), Rarely-25% of the time (4), and Never-0% of the time (5). | | |

These results indicate that the three most popular activities on Facebook amongst participants in this study were viewing photos, communicating with others through private messages or chat, and checking to see what someone is up to. On the other hand, activities that were used very little by participants included tagging and posting videos, creating and RSVP'ing to events, and playing games. Junco (2012) found that the three most popular activities among his participants were viewing photos, commenting on content, and checking to see what someone was doing. He also found that the least popular activities among his participants were playing games, tagging and posting videos, and creating and RSVP'ing to events.

Figure 3 below provides a visual representation of participants' frequency of performing Facebook activities.

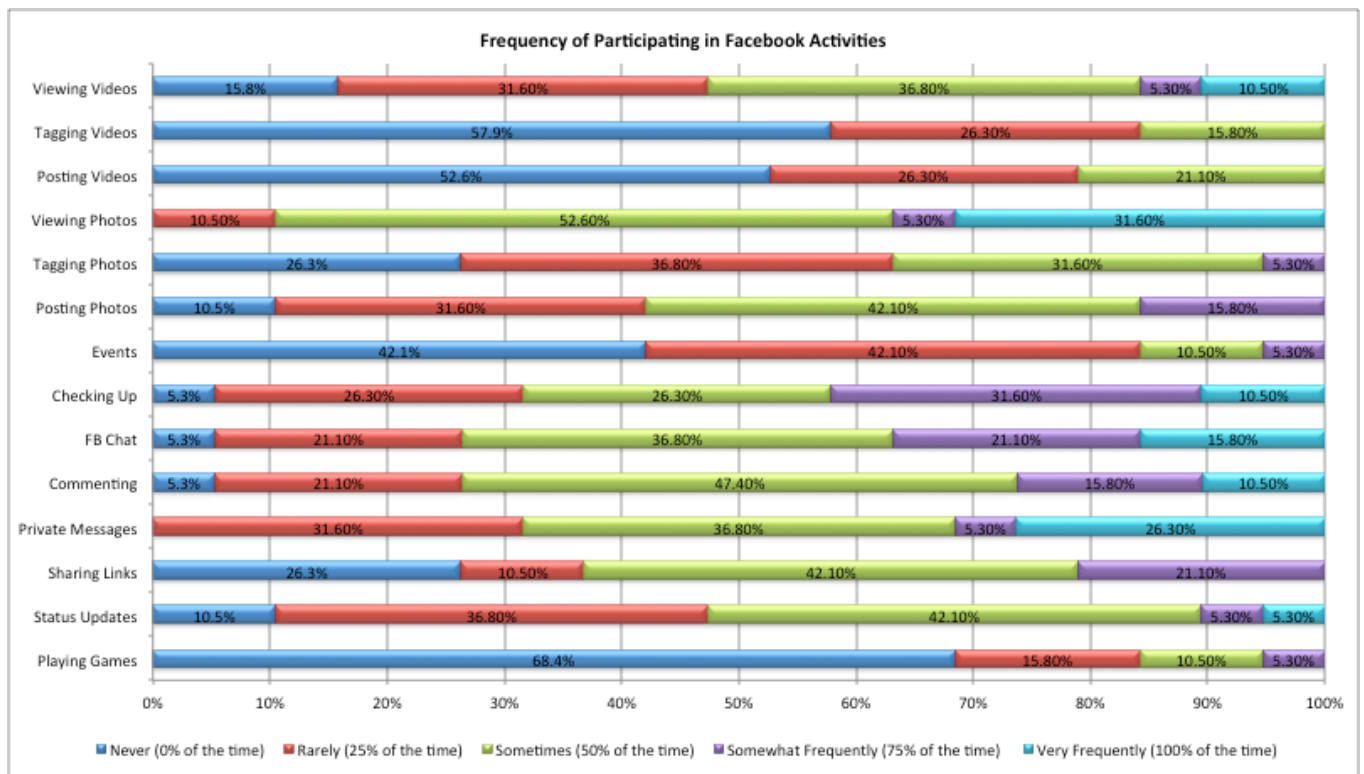


Figure 3: Frequency of Performing Facebook Activities

There is a very strong similarity between Junco's (2012) findings and my findings based on the participants' frequency of activity within Facebook. This indicates that there is a strong similarity between Junco's sample population and my population in regards to their activities within Facebook.

Learn about New People Scale and Reliability

The scale, *learn about new people*, was created to better understand how frequently Facebook activities were used to learn about new people. This scale is a three-item scale with a Cronbach's alpha of .79, indicating internal reliability. The mean of the individual items ranged from 1.67 to 4.00, with a mean on the total subscale of 8.47 (SD = 2.01), indicating that participants somewhat agreed that they use Facebook to learn about new people. White LGBTQ youth were more likely to use Facebook to learn about new people than minority youth were.

The mean of this scale for White LGBTQ youth was 3.00 (SD = .27) and for minority LGBTQ youth it was 2.72 (SD = .81). The mean and standard deviation of the items of the *learn about new people scale* for all participants are provided in Table 9 below.

Table 9: The mean and standard deviation of the “learn about new people scale”

| Item | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--|------|----------------|
| Indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.-I have used Facebook to check out someone I met socially | 3.21 | .713 |
| Indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.-I use Facebook to learn more about people in my classes | 2.84 | .765 |
| Indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.-I use Facebook to learn more about other people living near me | 2.42 | .902 |
| <i>Note:</i> These items were presented on a four-point Likert-type scale with the following scale Strongly disagree (1), somewhat disagree (2), somewhat agree (3), and strongly agree (4). | | |

These results indicate that most participants agree that they use Facebook as a tool to learn about new people. The most common tool used for learning about people was to use Facebook to check out someone that participants had met socially.

Explore New Relationships Scale and Reliability

This is a two-item scale used to better understand if participants use Facebook to meet new people and explore friendships or relationships with people they feel they can connect with. The reliability of this scale was measured with a Cronbach’s alpha of .75 indicating internal reliability. The mean of the individual items ranged from 2.47 to 2.90, with a mean on the total subscale of 5.37 (SD = 1.54). Minority LGBTQ youth had a mean of 2.77 (SD = .94) and White LGBTQ youth had a mean of 2.71 (SD = .39). Based on participants’ overall responses, Facebook is used to explore new relationships. The mean and standard deviation of the items of the *explore new relationships scale* for all participants are provided below in Table 10.

Table 10: The mean and standard deviation of the “explore new relationships scale”

| Item | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--|------|----------------|
| I use Facebook to meet new people | 2.47 | .964 |
| I use social media, such as Facebook, to help explore friendships/relationships with people that I feel I can connect with. | 2.89 | .737 |
| <i>Note:</i> These items were presented on a four-point Likert-type scale with the following scale Strongly disagree (1), somewhat disagree (2), somewhat agree (3), and strongly agree (4). | | |

Facebook was not as commonly used to meet new people, as it was to help explore friendships/relationships with people. Although Facebook can be used as a tool to meet new people, Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield (2006) suggest that people are more likely to use Facebook to search for people they feel they have an offline connection with more than they would use Facebook as a tool for meeting strangers.

Commitment

Commitment is a six-item scale used to measure participants’ types and levels of commitment to Facebook. This scale is a modified version of Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe’s (2007) Facebook Intensity Scale (FBI) that was used by the researchers to better understand the emotional connection participants had with Facebook as well to better understand the integration of Facebook into participants’ daily lives. The FBI in Ellison et al. (2007) had a Cronbach’s alpha of .83 with a sample size of 286 ($N = 286$). Even with the small size of $N = 19$, the scale in this study had a similar measure of reliability with a Cronbach’s alpha of .88. Although a different scale is utilized in this study, these results are similar to the findings reported by Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe’s (2007) study. The mean of the individual items ranged from 2.37 to 3.26, with an overall mean on the total scale of 17.11 ($SD = 4.47$). White LGBTQ youth and minority youth showed similar responses on the commitment scale. White LGBTQ youth had a

mean of 2.95 (SD = .33) and minority LGBTQ youth had a mean of 2.79 (SD = .92). The mean and standard deviation of the items of the *commitment scale* for all participants are provided in Table 11 below.

Table 11: The mean and standard deviation of the “commitment scale”

| Item | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|------|----------------|
| Facebook is a part of my everyday activity. | 3.26 | .733 |
| I am proud to tell people I’m on Facebook. | 2.89 | .737 |
| Facebook has become a part of my daily routine. | 3.00 | 1.000 |
| I feel out of touch when I haven’t logged into Facebook for a while. | 2.63 | 1.116 |
| I feel I am part of the Facebook community. | 2.37 | .955 |
| I would be sorry if Facebook shut down. | 2.95 | 1.026 |
| <i>Note:</i> These items were presented on a four-point Likert-type scale with the following scale Strongly disagree (1), somewhat disagree (2)s, somewhat agree (3), and strongly agree (4). | | |

Overall, in this study the participants’ responses indicated that they had a moderate degree of commitment to Facebook. Although most participants indicated that they agree that Facebook has become a part of their everyday activity and daily routine, not all participants agree that they feel part of the Facebook community. Similarly not all participants agree that they feel out of touch when they haven’t logged into Facebook for a while nor would they be sad if Facebook shut down. This indicates that participants’ do not have either a high level or low level of commitment with Facebook.

Despite participants’ overall belief that they were only moderately a part of the Facebook community, more than half of the participants reported having over 250 Facebook friends. The maximum number of Facebook friends one can have is 5,000. There was no data readily available about the average number of Facebook friends that teens have. However, Backstrom (2011) reported that 50 percent of all active Facebook users have more than 100 Facebook

friends and on average about 190 Facebook friends. The graph in Figure 4 displays the number of Facebook friends that participants in this study reported having.

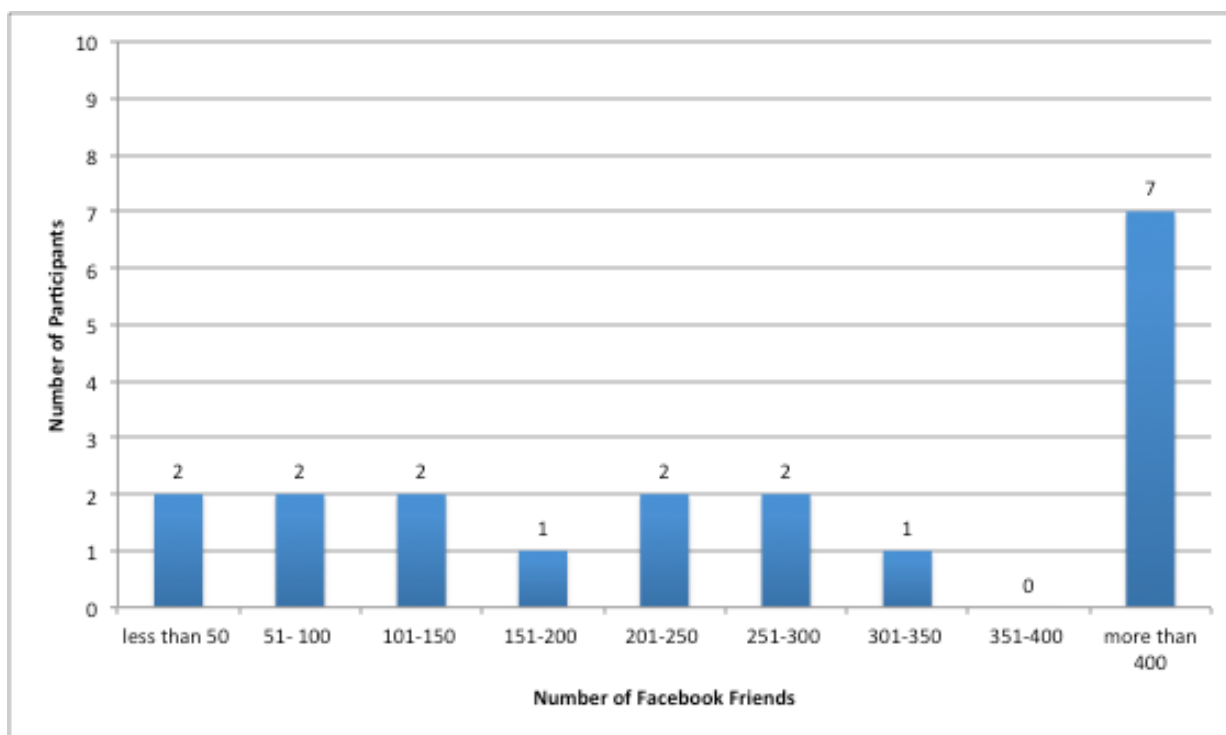


Figure 4: Number of Facebook Friends

These findings indicate that the number of Facebook friends one has in does not directly relate to a sense of community nor commitment with Facebook, but it might suggests why participants make Facebook a part of their daily lives and why they would be sad if Facebook shut down.

Comfort Online

The scale of *comfort online* was created to determine participants' level of comfort in expressing themselves and exploring issues regarding their gender and/or sexual orientation on Facebook. The scale is a three-item scale with a Cronbach's alpha of .75 indicating internal reliability within these three items. The mean of the individual items ranged from 2.47 to 3.00. White LGBTQ youth had a mean of 2.86 (SD = .72) on the commitment scale, and multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth had a mean of 2.72 (SD = .81). The overall mean for the scale was

8.32 (SD = 2.29) indicating that participants' had a moderate degree of comfort when on Facebook in regards to expressing and exploring issues of sexuality and gender. The mean and standard deviation of the items of the *comfort online scale* for all participants are provided in Table 12 below.

Table 12: The mean and standard deviation of the “comfort online scale”

| Item | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|------|----------------|
| When compared to off-line face-to-face interactions, I feel social media allows me to explore/express my gender and sexuality in a comfortable space. | 2.84 | .898 |
| I am comfortable disclosing information about my personal life through social media sites such as Facebook. | 2.47 | .841 |
| I am more at ease/comfortable when communicating through social media than I am in face-to-face settings. | 3.00 | 1.054 |
| <i>Note:</i> These items were presented on a four-point Likert-type scale with the following scale Strongly disagree (1), somewhat disagree (2)s, somewhat agree (3), and strongly agree (4). | | |

Although participants had some hesitancy about disclosing information about their personal lives through social media sites such as Facebook, they felt more comfortable communicating through social media than in face-to-face settings. One participant's comment helps to better understand why online communication is more comfortable than offline communication, “I am not so good at expressing myself with people face-to-face, and I believe I can express myself a bit more clearly online. That being said, online conversations have been a much more positive experience than face-to-face conversations.” Another participant explains, “when I see people face to face I sometimes do not have the opportunity to feel safe and enjoy being myself because I get bullied”. A third participant said the following, “On Facebook, I am more likely to find support.” Another participant explained, “when discussing an uncomfortable

topic, I like talking online (sic) because you have endless time to respond without seeming like a jerk.” When asked where they felt most comfortable and supportive in conversations, a participant stated the following, “Online, because (sic) I can talk freely” and another person stated, “I prefer facebook conversations.” Turkle (2011) explains that communication in the virtual world allows us to control a vulnerable situation. Not only can we can decide when and where we want to communicate, but we can also decide how much time we want to devote to carefully crafting our communication (p. 190).

Another question that was asked to better understand participants’ level of comfort online dealt with cyberbullying. The item was presented to participants in the following manner, “When using social media I have been a victim of cyberbullying. [In this case, cyberbullying is defined as using technology to repeatedly attack a person in order to hurt him/her and cause damage to his/her reputation (Smith et al., 2008)].” Participants had the option of selecting an answer based on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from *Very frequently* (1) to *Never* (5). The results indicated the following:

- 42.1 percent of participants had never been a victim of cyberbullying.
- 31.6 percent of participants had rarely been a victim of cyberbullying.
- 10.5 percent of participants had sometimes been a victim of cyberbullying.
- 15.8 percent of participants had frequently been a victim of cyberbullying.

57.9 percent of participants reported being a victim of cyberbullying at some point. This is similar to what GLSEN (2011) reported in their National School Climate Survey conducted with teens between the ages of 13 and 20 (N= 8584). GLSEN (2011) found that 55.2 percent of LGBTQ teens experienced cyberbullying (via text message or Facebook posting) in the past year (GLSEN, 2011, p. xiv-xv). However, it is significant to mention that only 15.8 percent of

participants in this study reported frequently being a victim of cyberbullying, and almost half of the participants in this study had never been a victim of cyberbullying. This finding is likely to be why 68.4 percent of participants in this study reported that they are more comfortable and at ease when communicating through social media than in face-to-face settings.

Discussion

The findings presented provide a baseline description of how social media were being used at a particular slice of time during a six-month period from November, 2012 to April, 2013 by a specific self-identified population. Due to IRB specific and time-specific limitations, the findings are by no means intended to be generalized to larger population. Furthermore, it is noted that if this study were to be replicated, it is assumed that the types of social media used would possibly change given the rapidly evolving and emerging world of social media. However, establishing a baseline view of social media use among LGBTQ youth at this time provides a unique view of the impacts of social media on this population.

Although it was an assumption that multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth would use social media differently from White LGBTQ youth, there were no significant differences with these groups in this study. Previous research in feminist and queer studies (Cantú, 2011; Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989; De Reus, Few, & Blume, 2005; Ferguson, 2005) suggests that the intersection of sexuality, race, class, gender are important paradigms that contribute to individuals' unique perspectives. However, this study suggests that race and ethnicity may not play a significant factor in LGBTQ youth's of social media. This is perhaps because many LGBTQ teens are moving away from the desire to be labeled (Savin-Williams, 2005). For example, Savin-Williams (2005) explains that for the modern teenager, labels are a thing of the past and come with heavy burdens that most teens do not wish to carry with them. Data in this study suggest

that factors or labels, if you will, such as race are not significant factors that determine multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth's use of social media. This finding is significant because it impacts the direction of future studies because future studies focusing on race could be conducted to confirm these results.

In revisiting the research questions that this study sought to answer, the following was determined:

Do social media provide a safe space for multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth to express and explore issues of sexuality and gender?

The answer to this research question is yes. The results indicate that about 75 percent of all participants had rarely or never been victims of cyberbullying. Only three participants reported being a victim of cyberbullying somewhat frequently. These results suggest that social media (not including texting) has become a safer space for LGBTQ youth. Analysis of other research questions indicates that all participants possessed a moderate degree of comfort using social media to explore and express themselves. Further analysis and breakdowns of multiply marginalized LGBTQ youth indicate that in comparison to White LGBTQ youth, less than 17 percent of multiply marginalized youth reported they had sometimes or somewhat frequently been cyberbullied, whereas over 42 percent of White youth reported they had been cyberbullied. This is a significant finding, suggesting that race plays a substantial factor in falling victim to cyberbullying. However, it is not the multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth population that reported being a victim of cyberbullying, but the White LGBTQ youth population that reported that they had more frequently fallen victim to cyberbullying. This finding provides evidence that social media potentially offers a safer space for multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth than for

White LGBTQ youth. The comparisons between multiply marginalized and White LGBTQ youth can be seen in the graph in Figure 5.

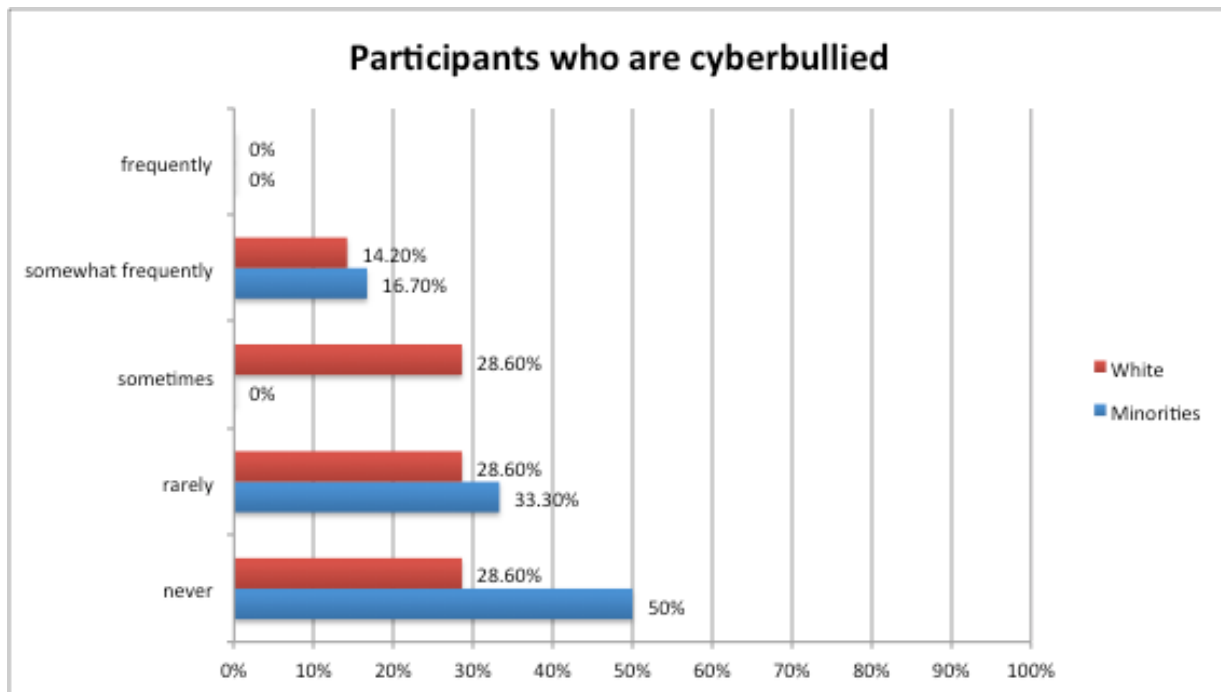


Figure 5: Participants Who Are Cyberbullied

What levels of commitment do multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth have with social media such as Facebook?

Research data suggests that all participants have a moderate degree of commitment with social media. It is a part of their daily routine and everyday activity. Most participants have over 400 Facebook friends and check their Facebook page more than a few times a day. Specifically on the *commitment scale*, multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth have a mean of 2.79 (SD = .92), similar to White LGBTQ youth who have a mean of 2.95 (SD = .33).

What types of activities did multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth most frequently perform on Facebook?

While using Facebook, participants frequently viewed photos (75 percent -100 percent of their time on Facebook). The next most frequently performed activities (50 percent – 75 percent of their time on Facebook) was spent: posting photos, checking to see what someone was up to, chatting on Facebook chat, commenting (on statuses, wall posts, pictures, etc.), sending private messages, sharing links, and posting status updates. Participants reported that they rarely or never spent their time on Facebook: tagging videos, posting videos, tagging photos, creating or RSVP'ing to events, and/or playing games.

What types of connection strategies did multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth use on Facebook?

Facebook was used as a tool to explore new friendships and relationships with people they feel they can connect with. It was also used as a tool to meet new people. However, this was not as commonly used as exploring. They also used Facebook as a communication tool with people they already knew.

Summary

The findings and data analysis indicate that LGBTQ youth frequently access social media. Participants reported that the most common social media sites visited were Facebook and YouTube. Facebook was used by 100 percent of participants at least once a week. The three most popular activities on Facebook amongst participants in this study were viewing photos, communicating with others through private messages or chat, and checking to see what someone is up to. The three least popular activities on Facebook were tagging and posting videos, creating and RSVP'ing to events, and playing games. These findings were comparable to Junco's (2012) findings about frequency of Facebook activities. A majority of participants agreed that they used Facebook as a tool to learn about new people and explore new

relationships. However, Facebook was not commonly used to meet new people. Using Facebook had become a part of nearly 75 percent of participants' daily lives, and 84.2 percent admitted that Facebook was a part of their everyday activity. Over half of the participants felt out of touch when they had not logged into Facebook for a while. Close to 80 percent of participants were proud to tell people that they were on Facebook. Almost 80 percent of participants would be sad if Facebook shut down. However, less than half of the participants felt as though they were part of the Facebook community. Over a third of the participants had more than 400 Facebook friends. The average number of Facebook friends in this study is significantly higher than in Ellison et al.'s (2007) study, which reported that participants had an average of between 150-200 Facebook friends. Additionally over 68 percent of participants were more comfortable communicating through social media than in offline situations. Social media was a space where close to 75 percent of participants felt safe and had rarely if ever fallen victim to cyberbullying. More specifically, over 80 percent of multiply minoritized youth reported that they had rarely or never been the victim of cyberbullying compared to 58 percent of White LGBTQ youth who reported they had rarely or never been the victim of cyberbullying. That is, less than 20 percent of multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth reported being cyberbullied and 42 percent of White LGBTQ youth reported they had been cyberbullied. These results indicate that social media potentially provide a safe space for LGBTQ youth, particularly multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth whom believed they were less frequently cyberbullied than White LGBTQ youth.

This chapter provided a discussion surrounding the results and data analysis of the findings in this study. The last chapter provides recommendations based on the findings of this study as well as recommendations for further research.

Chapter 5 - Discussions, Implications, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the implications of this study as it relates to new media studies, queer studies, and youth studies. It begins with a discussion of the outcomes of the study while comparing the results with similar studies conducted with different populations. Recommendations and suggestions for future research are also discussed.

Discussion

This study was modeled after previous studies (Junco, 2012; Ellison et al. 2007) on social media use. However, my study had a very different population than the previous studies conducted by Junco and Ellison et al. Previous studies focused on adults and sexual orientation was not an area of focus, whereas this was one of the first studies to focus on multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth, addressing a gap in the literature.

The analysis and findings indicate that LGBTQ youth frequently access social media. The most common social media sites visited are Facebook and YouTube. YouTube was used on a weekly basis by almost 74 percent of participants. However, no data were collected to determine what participants used YouTube for. Facebook was used by 100 percent of participants at least once a week. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the three most popular activities on Facebook amongst participants in this study included viewing photos, communicating with others through private messages or chat, and checking to see what others are doing. The three least favorite activities on Facebook included tagging and posting videos, creating and RSVP'ing to events, and playing games. These findings are similar to Junco's (2012) study.

A majority of participants agreed that they use Facebook as a tool to learn about new people and explore new relationships. Similar to Ellison et al.'s (2007) study, Facebook was not commonly used to meet new people. Using Facebook had become a part of nearly 75 percent of participants' daily lives, and 84.2 percent admit that Facebook is a part of their everyday activity. Over half of the participants feel out of touch when they haven't logged into Facebook for a while. Close to 80 percent of participants are proud to tell people they are on Facebook. Almost 80 percent of participants would be sad if Facebook shut down. However, less than half of the participants feel they are part of the Facebook community.

Over a third of the participants had more than 400 Facebook friends. Social media was a space where close to 75 percent of participants felt safe and had rarely if ever fallen victim to cyberbullying. Additionally over 68 percent of participants were more comfortable communicating through social media than in offline situations.

Also the results indicated that there was no statistical significance in multiply marginalized LGBTQ when compared to White LGBTQ youth in any of the categories mentioned above. This finding is significant because it was my assumption that race would be a factor in LGBTQ youth's experiences and uses with social media based on previous research about intersectionality.

Prior to this study, very little was known about multiply marginalized LGBTQ youth between 14-17, specifically about the significance of social media in their daily lives and routines. In fact, much we know about LGBTQ youth has been from results of retrospective studies. In retrospective studies, adults are remembering about an event from the past. However, this study was conducted with LGBTQ youth contemporaneously and the participants did not have to rely on their memories to recall their experiences and uses of social media. In

essence, all the findings in this study are new, significant, and provide a baseline for future research in this field.

Implications and Contributions

This research study showed that it was possible to generate a baseline description of social media use among multiply marginalized LGBTQ youth. As with most exploratory research in emerging fields, my study utilized a small sample to gain insight and describe the phenomena being explored. Due to the small sample size, it is difficult to generalize to a wider population. However, my dissertation is one of the first studies to focus on the uses of social media among multiply marginalized LGBTQ youth, therefore any findings are significant. One of the most significant implications of my study is that it can serve as a productive framework from which to study multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth's uses of social media in more detail. Because my dissertation was an interdisciplinary study, the findings have implications for the fields of new media studies, queer studies, and youth studies.

One of the significant implications and contributions of my study is that it provides a baseline description upon which further scholarship can be built. Significant information is provided about social media use among a population that had yet to be studied. Findings in my study suggest that the most popular form of social media amongst LGBTQ youth during November 2012 and April 2013 was Facebook, and MySpace was not used frequently, if at all, by LGBTQ youth during this time period. Additionally, findings have implications that cyberbullying is less frequently experienced by multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth when compared to White LGBTQ youth. My study provides implications for the field of queer and youth studies because findings of my study indicate that social media can be used as a potentially

safe space for multiply minoritized LGBTQ youth to explore and construct identities. Furthermore, my study provides a foundation upon which future studies can be developed.

Recommendations

It is recommended that IRB protocol be responsive to the balance of the need for studies about LGBTQ youth and the ethical considerations that are required. IRB protocol has strict guidelines intended to protect children when research is conducted. Parental consent is usually required in order to conduct studies involving youth. However, an online survey was one of the only options available when parental consent was waived. It was believed that waiving parental consent for participants in this study was paramount because for many LGBTQ youth, their own families are places where violence and bullying are central to their life experiences (Ryan, 2009). This means that requiring parental consent for their involvement in a research study is not reasonable (as defined by 45 CFR 46.408-c) and could result in harm to the participant. According to The Code of Federal Regulations, “in addition to the provisions for waiver contained in §46.116 of subpart A, if the IRB determines that a research protocol is designed for conditions or for a subject population for which parental or guardian permission is not a reasonable requirement to protect the subjects (for example, neglected or abused children), it may waive the consent requirements in Subpart A of this part and paragraph (b) of this section, provided an appropriate mechanism for protecting the children who will participate as subjects in the research is substituted, and provided further that the waiver is not inconsistent with federal, state, or local law” (45 CFR 46.408-c). While this code allowed for the waiver of parental consent, my contact with my participants was thereby eliminated, restricting interactions with the participants to an anonymous self-reported survey. Revisions of IRB protocol to include waiving parental consent for more in-depth studies would open the door to learning more about LGBTQ

youth, or perhaps allowing for technology mediated environments utilizing anonymous online chats/interviews with participants.

It is also recommended that social media be used as a tool to reach LGBTQ youth in positive and supportive ways similar to the ways in which *The It Gets Better Project* has used YouTube to reach many LGBTQ youth. The findings indicate that social media is widely accessed and utilized by LGBTQ youth potentially opening the door to virtually reaching many individuals in a space where they feel safe and comfortable.

It is hoped and recommended that social media be viewed as a tool for communication about sensitive topics such as gender and sexuality. Topics such as these are difficult for most youth to discuss, however, LGBTQ youth also have the added pressure of being seen as abnormal. Social media provide the protection and comfort that face-to-face settings cannot offer.

Suggestions for Further Study

This dissertation provides a base upon which further scholarship can be built. The replication of this study with more participants would be a powerful addition to the literature as well as social awareness about LGBTQ youth. Additional and more diverse participants would allow for a greater power to conduct correlational studies as well as generalizability of the results for better understanding the population being studied. A more detailed quantitative study such as a comparative study between LGBTQ youth and non-LGBTQ youth would significantly contribute to the literature as well. A qualitative addition to this study, such as interviews, would greatly enhance the phenomenology of how social media influence, shape, and impact identities of LGBTQ youth. An additional suggestion for further study is to replicate this study focusing only on Latina/o LGBTQ youth living in border regions since Hispanic/Latina/o populations are

the fastest growing groups (U.S. Census, 2010). Another area for replication of this study would include comparing the uses of social media by LGBTQ youth living in geographic locations where same-sex marriage is legal and where same-sex marriage is not legal. It is this researcher's perception that there is more tolerance and freedom in places where same-sex marriage is legal than in places where it is not legal. Conducting a comparative study based on geographic location would provide insight into this perception.

An additional recommendation is that further study be conducted to reinforce the validity and reliability of the survey instrument that was created for this study. Since there was not a previously existing instrument for measuring LGBTQ youth's engagement with social media in terms of frequency of activities, commitment to social media, comfort online, and learning about new people, an instrument was created for this study. Although the items were tested and found to be reliable, further studies would reinforce and strengthen the validity of this instrument.

Summary

This study was the first of its kind. It was a quantitative online study utilizing survey research methodology. The study was conducted in order to explore, understand, and document the multiple ways that Latina/o LGBTQ youth between the ages of 13 and 17 use social media. Because there is not previous research that focuses on this population, this study served as a baseline study with the intent to provide a description of how social media were being used at a slice in time by a self-identified population.

Specifically, this study explored and documented the ways that the participants (N = 19) interacted with social media. The study described participants in terms of their demographic information, accessibility to social media, frequency of activity within social media sites such as Facebook, their use of social media to learn about people and explore new relationships, their

types and levels of commitment to social media, and their perception of being comfortable online to express and explore issues of sexuality and gender identity.

The findings indicate that social media, such as Facebook, are an important aspect in most of the participants' lives as evidenced by 100 percent of participants reporting that they use Facebook at least once a week. Additionally, over 80 percent of participants claim that Facebook is a part of their everyday activity. Facebook is used as a tool for communication with others, as a tool to check up on others and see what they are doing, as well as to view photos. More than 30 percent of participants have over 400 Facebook friends, indicating that social media is used to maintain friendships and communicate with friends. Social media also provides a safe space for over 68 percent of participants who admit they would rather communicate online because they feel more comfortable and at ease when compared to face-to-face settings. Additionally, it was found that multiply marginalized youth, such as LGBTQ youth of color, have no significant differences when compared to White LGBTQ youth and their use of and relationship to social media.

These findings are significant for a number of reasons. First and foremost, there were no prior studies that focused on multiply marginalized LGBTQ youth and their use of social media. Second, this research has provided powerful evidence that LGBTQ youth are more comfortable communicating online through social media and more comfortable using social media as a tool to explore their gender and sexual identity. This evidence provides the possibility of using new media to reach LGBTQ youth in ways that have yet to be discovered. One such social media tool used to reach LGBTQ youth is the *It Gets Better Project*. The success of this project lies in the idea that social media is a mobile tool that can reach youth in a comfortable space. With this in mind, it is necessary to design and create more social media tools to help LGBTQ explore

their identities. It is also of grave importance to take what we learn from the safe space online in social media and apply it to create safer spaces in the real world.

The continued onslaught of LGBTQ youth and the continued marginalization of LGBTQ youth must improve. Online spaces that provide safety, tools for communication with others, a place to learn about new people and explore relationships, and a place to explore gender and sexuality must be embraced in order to improve conditions for LGBTQ youth to construct positive identity(s).

Conclusion

While this study was designed to be descriptive and exploratory in nature, this study serves to fill the paucity in the literature and lay a foundation for future research about multiply marginalized LGBTQ youth and their relationship with social media. The methods and instruments used in this study also serve as a reliable tool for future research in this field. The researcher believes they have provided a case in which social media is challenging notions about LGBTQ youth identity(s) construction and providing a potentially safe space for LGBTQ youth to work out issues of gender and sexuality. The researcher believes in the hopes and courage's that continued research in this field will offer possibilities for LGBTQ youth that have yet to be fully understood and explored.

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Appendix A- Definitions of Terminology

The terms provided below are a simplified definition of these terms that were used for purposes of this study. The definitions of many of the terms do not provide a context of where these terms originated from or an explanation of how they developed. However, it is noted that each of these terms have a discourse history, and many of them have highly political histories.

For example, many organizations, academics, and individuals refer to the same population using a variety of different letter configurations of, and additions to, this acronym: GLBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender); GLB (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual); GLBTQ (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer); LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer); GLBTQQ (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning); or LGBTQQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning) are examples (Miceli, 2005, p. 2). The placement of L before G is a feminist statement, and the omission of B and T is because many researchers believe that bisexual and transgender people should not be placed in the same grouping of lesbian and gay people because their identities are very differently experienced and understood. The use of the word queer has the history of being used as a derogatory term; however, it has more recently been used in a positive manner to refer to individuals who deviate from the norm. I use the term LGBTQ because I am using queer theory as seen through a feminist lens, and I use the term queer to refer to people who deviate from the norm.

It is also understood that my participants may not have shared the same definition as I had intended. For example, a female participant who is sexually attracted with another female may identify as gay rather than lesbian. The multiple meanings to terms in this study serves as another limitation in my study.

Bisexual

Bisexual refers to both females and males who are sexually attracted to members of the same sex and members of the opposite sex.

Cyberbullying

In this case, cyberbullying is defined as using technology to repeatedly attack a person in order to hurt him/her and cause damage to his/her reputation (Smith et al., 2008).

Facebook

Facebook is a registered trademark. It will be used throughout this study to describe the social network community found at Facebook.com. It is a web-based service that allows users to construct an online profile and communicate with others within their social network community.

Gay

The term gay was used to describe a male who is sexually attracted to another male. Although there is much debate surrounding this term, this is the meaning of the terminology that was intended in this study.

Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs)

GSAs are extracurricular groups in high schools that support and advocate for LGBTQ and their allies. These groups include students of any sexual orientation, including heterosexuals. GSAs are student-led groups and faculty-sponsored groups, which aim to provide a safe and supportive space on school campuses for LGBTQ students and their straight allies (Griffin et al, 2003; Miceli, 2005).

Hispanic and Latina/o

The United States Census Bureau (2010) uses the terms Hispanic or Latino to refer to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or

origin regardless of race. The census definition does not consider Brazilians Latin/o, and there is much controversy and debate surrounding this. I use the term Latina/o throughout this study to refer to the same group of people. However, it should be noted that this is not a homogenous group because Latina/o's span national, gender, class, generational, and racial boundaries (Davila, 2008).

Lesbian

The term lesbian was used to describe a female who is sexually attracted to another female. Although there is much debate surrounding this term, this is the meaning of the terminology that was intended in this study.

LGBTQ

This acronym stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and/or Queer/Questioning. I use this acronym throughout the study for consistency

Multiply Minoritized Youth

Multiply minoritized youth is a term that is used to describe an LGBTQ youth who falls into multi-dimensional minority categories such as minority race, gender, and sexual orientation. This term is based on the concept of intersectionality (Cantú, 2011; Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989; De Reus, Few, & Blume, 2005; Ferguson, 2005), which derived from feminist theory. Intersectionality suggests the intersection of sexual, gender, and racial identities are all paramount factors in the construction of identities. In essence, it is a tool for understanding the ways in which different aspects of identity interact with each other and impact each other. That is identities are impacted by other identities and not isolated components of a person's identity. Multiply marginalized was also used to refer to the same group of people.

Qualtrics

Qualtrics is a registered trademark. It will be used to describe the web-based software program used to create the survey, disseminate the survey, as well as collect and store data from the survey in an online space.

Social Media

Although social media is comprised of a myriad of different structures, this study looks specifically at the social networking site Facebook because this site is currently the most popular form of social media, if judged solely on the number of active registered users. Social network sites are defined by boyd and Ellison (2007) 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 by others within the system” (p. 211). The term social media and social networking will be used interchangeably.

Transgender

Transgender is an umbrella term for people who transgress society's view of gender and biological sex as necessarily fixed, unmoving, and following from one's biological sex. They tend to view gender as a spectrum, rather than a polarized, either/or construct. However, some people may see gender as points on a continuum, because, for example, transmen are likely to not have penises. There are, however, some people who view gender through the spectrum metaphor, but they are often called genderqueer. In this study, the term transgender refers to an individual whose gender identity does not match the biological gender assigned at birth. It does not imply or refer to a specific sexual orientation because a person who identifies as transgender may also identify as heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, pansexual, and/or asexual.

Queer

The term queer is a blanket term that can refer to anyone who transgresses society's views of gender or sexuality. In this study, I refer to queer as an identity that many individuals have taken on meaning to deviate from the expected or normal.

Questioning

The term questioning refers to the process of considering or exploring one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity. A term used to refer to an individual who is uncertain of her/his sexual orientation or identity.

Youth

The term youth is used to describe an adolescent between the ages of 14-17. I have narrowed this term to describe this age category because it is the age group prior to becoming a legal adult in most states, and this is the targeted age for my study. Pascoe (2007) further explains youth as, "as a time in which teenagers work to create identity and make the transition from childhood to adulthood. It is also constructed as a turbulent time psychologically, biologically, and socially" (p. 16).

Appendix B- Informed Consent and Survey

Principal Investigator: Alfie Leanna Lucero, Doctoral Candidate (allucero2@utep.edu)

Faculty Advisor(s): Brian Giza, PhD (bhgiza@utep.edu)

UTEP: Department of Education

Description: We are interested in the impacts and influences of social media on shaping the identities of Latina/o LGBTQ youth. *Participation of this study is anonymous and is expected to take around 20 minutes of your time.*

Confidentiality: You will not be asked to provide your name or any other identifiers in this survey. Any information from this study that is published will not identify you by name.

Benefits: The results of this study may benefit research in education. The results may add to the limited body of research surrounding the relationship between social media and Latina/o LGBTQ youth identity construction. There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. *If you choose to participate, you can enter a drawing for a chance to win one of two fifty-dollar iTunes gift cards. If you would like to participate in the drawing, you will be able to enter your contact information through an email link at the end of the survey. This drawing information will be detached from your survey answers.*

Risks: There are no known risks associated with this research. You will be asked to respond to survey questions regarding your level of social media use. It is not anticipated, however, should you feel any discomfort answering questions about your level of social media use and it's potential impact on identity, then you may refuse to answer any question or stop participation in the study at any time. Should you experience discomfort or harm as a result of participation in this study please inform Alfie Leanna Lucero (allucero2@utep.edu) so that you can be directed to the appropriate campus and community resources. Additionally, a list of regional, state and national resources/facilities is provided (at the end of this consent form) should you experience mental stress due to answering the survey.

Contact People: If you have questions or concerns about your participation as a research subject, please contact the principal investigator at allucero2@utep.edu and/or the UTEP Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (915-747-8841) or irb.orsp@utep.edu.

Voluntary Nature of Participation: *Your participation in this study is voluntary.* You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. If you do not take part in the study, there will be no penalty.

Mandatory reporting: Although this study is anonymous, if any information is revealed about child abuse or neglect, or potentially dangerous future behavior to others, the law requires that this information be reported to the proper authorities.

Consent: By electronically consenting, this means that you have freely agreed to participate in this research study. You should consent **ONLY** if you have read the previous information and you understand its contents. If you agree with the following statement and wish to participate in

the study, please click on the “I agree” button below. If you do not agree, simply close your browser.

I have read and understand the explanation provided to me, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

☐ I agree

.....

1. Do you have access to a computer for personal use?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

2. Do you have a smartphone, such as an iPhone, Android or Blackberry?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

3. Do you own a tablet device, such as an iPad, Xoom, Nook, or Kindle?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

4. Have you used a social media site such as Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube in the past two weeks?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

5. Which of the following social media do you use at least once a week? (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Twitter
- ☐ LinkedIn
- ☐ MySpace
- ☐ YouTube
- ☐ Blogs
- ☐ RSS news feeds
- ☐ Flickr or Photobucket
- ☐ Tumblr
- ☐ Instagram

6. How frequently do you visit social media sites? Would you say...

- ☐ less than once a week
- ☐ once a week
- ☐ a few times a week
- ☐ once a day
- ☐ a few times a day
- ☐ more than a few times a day

7. Approximately how many Facebook friends do you have?

- ☐ less than 50
- ☐ 51- 100
- ☐ 101-150
- ☐ 151-200
- ☐ 201-250
- ☐ 251-300
- ☐ 301-350
- ☐ 351-400
- ☐ more than 400

8. How frequently do you perform the following activities when you are on Facebook?

| | Very frequently (100% of the time) | Somewhat frequently (75% of the time) | Sometimes (50% of the time) | Rarely (25% of the time) | Never (0% of the time) |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Playing games (Farmville, MafiaWars, etc.) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Posting status updates | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Sharing links | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Sending private messages | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Commenting (on statuses, wall posts, pictures, etc.) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Chatting on Facebook chat | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Checking to see what someone is up to | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Creating or RSVP'ing to events | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Posting photos | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Tagging photos | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Viewing photos | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Posting videos | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Tagging videos | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Viewing videos | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

9. Indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

| | Strongly Disagree | Somewhat Disagree | Somewhat Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Facebook is a part of my everyday activity | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I am proud to tell people I'm on Facebook | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Facebook has become a part of my daily routine | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I feel out of touch when I haven't logged into Facebook for a while | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I feel I am part of the Facebook community | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I would be sorry if Facebook shut down | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I use Facebook to meet new people | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I have used Facebook to check out someone I met socially | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I use Facebook to learn more about people in my classes | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I use Facebook to learn more about other people living near me | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| My Facebook community is very similar to my face-to-face social community | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

10. What is your current age?

- ☐ 13
- ☐ 14
- ☐ 15
- ☐ 16
- ☐ 17

11. Do you consider yourself...

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Transgender (a gender other than the one assigned to you at birth)
- ☐ Other

12. What is your race?

- ☐ African American
- ☐ Asian-Pacific Islander
- ☐ Hispanic/Latino
- ☐ Native American
- ☐ White
- ☐ White, non-Hispanic
- ☐ Other

13. Are you sexually attracted to...

- ☐ Females
- ☐ Males
- ☐ Both Females and Males
- ☐ Gender doesn't matter to me
- ☐ None of the above

14. Do you consider yourself to be...

- ☐ Bisexual
- ☐ Gay
- ☐ Lesbian
- ☐ Queer
- ☐ Straight
- ☐ I don't label myself
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ None of the above

15. I use social media, such as Facebook, to help explore friendships/relationships with people that I feel I can connect with.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

16. I use social media, such as Facebook, to help explore organizations and/or groups that I feel can support me.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

17. When compared to off-line face-to-face interactions, I feel social media allows me to explore/express my gender and sexuality in a comfortable space.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

18. I am comfortable disclosing information about my personal life through social media sites such as Facebook.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

19. I am comfortable disclosing information about my personal life in face-to-face settings.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

20. I am more at ease/comfortable when communicating through social media than I am in face-to-face settings.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

21. When communicating online I feel I am understood.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

22. When communicating in face-to-face settings I feel I am understood.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

23. I am more understood when communicating through social media than I am in face-to-face settings.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

24. When using social media I have been a victim of cyberbullying. [In this case, cyberbullying is defined as using technology to repeatedly attack a person in order to hurt him/her and cause damage to his/her reputation (Smith et al., 2008).]

- ☐ Very frequently (100% of the time)
- ☐ Somewhat frequently (75% of the time)
- ☐ Sometimes (50% of the time)
- ☐ Rarely (25% of the time)
- ☐ Never

25. In which state do you currently reside?

26. In which county do you currently reside?

27. In which city do you currently reside?

28. Compare the conversations you have had with Facebook friends to conversations you have had off-line in face-to-face settings. Which conversations are more supportive? Why?

Thank you for your participation in this study. At this time if you would like to enter a drawing to win one of two fifty-dollar iTunes gift cards please click on the link below to provide your contact information. Please note that this drawing information will be detached from your survey answers.

- ☐ Yes, I would like to provide my email address to enter a drawing to win a fifty-dollar iTunes gift card
- ☐ No, I would not like to provide my email address to enter a drawing to win a fifty-dollar iTunes gift card

WIN A \$50 iTunes GIFT CARD

UTEP is doing research on the impact of social media on LGBTQ youth. We would love for you to participate in this groundbreaking research. Take 10 minutes to complete an anonymous online survey and have your voice heard!

You are eligible to participate if you are:

- *LGBTQ*
- *Between 13 – 17 years old*
- *A user of social media*
- *Live in a border region*

You can access the online survey at the following link:
https://utep.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_e9UQwkuWmmmIWKV

You can also access the survey from the following website:
<http://UTEPLGBTQ.weebly.com/>
Or you can access the survey with this QR Code



LGBTQ Social Media Study
Win a \$50 iTunes Card
<http://UTEPLGBTQ.weebly.com/>

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Win a \$50 iTunes Card
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18

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Win a \$50 iTunes Card
<http://UTEPLGBTQ.weebly.com/>

Appendix D- List of Resources Provided to Participants

El Paso Resources

- Sexual Trauma and Assault Response Service (STARS) Rape Crisis Center
Crisis Line: (915) 799-1800
- Center Against Family Violence
24-hour Crisis Hotline: (915) 593-7300 or (800) 727-4815
- University Medical Center of El Paso
Alameda Avenue, El Paso, TX 79905
Phone: (915) 544-1200

Juárez, Mexico

- Casa Amiga centro de crisis A.C.
Hotline: (656) 690-8300 or (656) 690-8301
- Casa Amiga
Peru Norte 878
Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua
Phone: (656) 615-3850
Website: <http://www.casaamigajuarez.org/Presentation.html>

Las Cruces, NM

- La Pi'on Sexual Assault Recovery Services of Southern NM
418 West Griggs St.
Las Cruces, NM 88005
Telephone-Local (505) 526-3437 or Toll Free: (888) 595-7273
Website: <http://www.zianet.com/lapionon/contact.html>

State Resources

- Texas Office of The Attorney General Sexual Assault Prevention and Crisis Services
www.oag.state.tx.us/victims/sapcs.shtml
- Texas Office of The Attorney General Crime Victims Division
www.oag.state.tx.us/victims/cvc.shtml
- Texas Department of Criminal Justice Victims Services Division
www.tdcj.state.tx.us/victim/victim-home.htm
- For a comprehensive list of sexual assault centers in Texas, go to the Texas association Against Sexual Assault (TAASA) website at: www.taasa.org

National Links

- Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) www.rainn.org
- The National Center for Victims of Crime www.ncvc.org

- National Sexual Violence Resource Center www.nsvrc.org
- National Violence Against Women Prevention Research Center www.vawprevention.org
- Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) www.who.int/svri/en/
- U.S. Department of Justice Office on Violence against Women www.ojp.usdoj.gov/vawo
- U.S. Department of Justice office for Victims of Crime www.ojp.usdoj.gov/vawo
- Violence Against Women Online Resources www.vaw.umn.edu
- VAWnet Online Resource Library www.vawnet.org

Vita

Alfie Leanna Lucero, known as Leanna, earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in Technical Theatre at the University of Texas at El Paso in 2000. She received her Master of Education in Educational Leadership and Foundations from UTEP in 2007. In summer of 2009 she joined the Teaching, Learning, & Culture doctoral program.

With over twelve years of experience in private and public education, Lucero has taught elementary, middle school, and high school students in various subjects, which include English Language Arts, Science, Mathematics, Theatre Arts, and Band. She also has eight years of administrative experience serving as a mathematics department chair, middle school director, and grant site coordinator.

Leanna has been the recipient of numerous honors, awards, and scholarships including a LULAC Scholarship, College of Education Summer Scholarship, as well as a UTEP Graduate Scholarship. She was recently nominated for a UTEP award for outstanding teaching by a graduate student. She is also a finalist in the state of Texas for being inducted as a member of the Texas review panel to evaluate instructional materials submitted for adoption in 2013.

While pursuing her degree, Leanna worked full-time as an administrator in the Ysleta Independent School District. She also worked at UTEP in the Department of Teacher Education as a Lecturer teaching undergraduate and graduate level courses. In addition, she also worked part-time as a graduate assistant in the Department of Teacher Education.

Leanna is an emerging scholar whose interests and talents span the arts and social sciences. She is extremely interested in interdisciplinary work, and her research focuses on the social and cultural implications of digital worlds for minoritized youth. *She has also studied and published scholarly articles about the integration of technology and mathematics.*

She has presented her research at numerous conferences including the 2012 Society for

Informational Technology and Teacher Education (SITE) Conference, 2012 After School Centers on Education (ACE) Conference, 2012 Kaleidoscope Conference, 2012 Sun Conference, 2011 Women's History Conference, 2010 Queer Leadership Conference, and *Spring 2009 Circle Conference*.

Leanna plans to become a fulltime professor at a university where she can continue her interdisciplinary research as well as continue teaching undergraduate and graduate students.