



The
University
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“They’re the reason I am still here. Alive”: Experiences
of online communities amongst young adults who are
LGBTQ+.

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Abstract

A heteronormative culture in UK schools that normalises discrimination towards the LGBTQ+ community resulting in ongoing challenges to mental wellbeing and access to school is well documented (Johnson, 2023; Formby, 2015; McDermott & Roen, 2016). However, there is limited research exploring protective factors that young people who are LGBTQ+ employ.

I adopted a critical realist positionality alongside a narrative methodology. I utilised Queer and transgender theories as a critical lens, which privileges the voices of individuals who are LGBTQ+ or resist cis/heteronormative ideals. I sought to explore the experiences of online communities amongst young adults who are LGBTQ+ during the period they attended an educational setting, considering the ecological systems that may impact a young person's lived experiences. My hope was that participants would feel empowered through sharing their narratives, which may provide implications for educational professionals to better understand the role of online communities for young people who are LGBTQ+.

I used the 'Listening Guide' to analyse the participant's narratives (Gilligan, 2015). I identified four common themes across all three narratives; the use of specific labels, the conflict between how participants wanted to be viewed and were viewed, belonging, and the stigma present in engaging in online communities. My findings suggest that online communities provided a powerful source of acceptance, belonging and information when participants were experiencing isolation, fear and prejudice in educational settings. Having access to a secure sense of belonging and acceptance was highly valued by the participants. Implications for educational professionals are presented, relating to the identified common themes. There is a specific focus on consulting with young people who are LGBTQ+ alongside the need for systematic approaches to supporting young people who are LGBTQ+.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

My research is focused on the experiences of children and young people (CYP) who are LGBTQ+. I acknowledge the personal connection I have to this area of research and the influence my interests and prior experiences have had on the approach and decisions that I have made.

Whilst working in a secondary school, my role predominantly centred around supporting young people who faced difficulties engaging with school. A high number of students I supported were LGBTQ+, and my role included working closely with the local youth pride group. My job allowed me to see the experiences many students who are LGBTQ+ had in school, particularly the positive impact that a sense of community provided, as well as access to trusted adults. I also spent time listening to the challenging experiences of LGBTQ+ students. My work allowed me to see the empowerment young people can gain when their stories are listened to and the understanding it can provide to other professionals in understanding a young person's experience and perspective.

I feel that my undergraduate studies in Criminology and Social Policy have provided me with the foundational understanding of the impact governmental structures and legislation often have on the lives of marginalised young people, whilst also providing me with a desire to think systemically and recognise the impact and capacity for systemic change in the education system. My studies have encouraged a tendency to consider systemic implications and the impact of a young person's environmental context.

I have chosen to disclose my bi identity in this thesis in the hopes of being entirely open and transparent as a researcher. Unfortunately, whilst I was fortunate not to have experienced discrimination at school, with access to a secure social network, extensive stigma was present throughout my time in education towards the LGBTQ+ community. As a result, I resisted the use of any labels to define my sexual orientation in an attempt to separate myself from the negative perceptions others may have held. Although no longer reflective of how I live, I was aware of the stigma surrounding bisexual identities, including the lack of authenticity through which others can consider the labels (DeLucia & Smith, 2021). However, through discussions with an EP colleague, I

felt empowered to make my positionality clear, which perhaps highlights the importance of further research and the positive impact feeling heard and supported can often have.

I recognise my bias and objectivity in the research process. Therefore, I kept a research journal, selected an analysis method that utilised a reflexive process and engaged in discussions with my research supervisor, peers and other LGBTQ+ researchers. Additionally, I have included reflection boxes throughout the thesis to provide insight into the reflective process of carrying out the research and writing this thesis. In light of my interest and experiences, it felt fitting to explore the narratives of young people who are LGBTQ+ with an emancipatory endeavour.

To aid the reader I have created a summary table, defining some key terminology used throughout this thesis (Table 1). I have not intended the table to be a comprehensive list because, as Koenig (2019) proposed, caution is required when using gender and sexual identity labels, as terminology can overlook individual language interpretations.

Table 1
LGBTQ+ Key Terminology

Term	Definition
Asexual	Someone who does not experience sexual attraction (Stonewall, 2023)
Bi/ Bisexual	An all-encompassing term used to express a romantic, and/or sexual attraction, and/or emotional attraction to more than one gender (Stonewall, 2023; Flanders et al., 2017)
Cisgender (Cis)	An individual whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth (Stonewall, 2023).
Cisnormativity	A default assumption that cisgender is the norm (Koenig, 2019).
Coming Out	An individual sharing their gender and or sexual orientation for the first time (Stonewall, 2023).
Deadnaming	Referring to or calling someone by a name they have changed, typically a birth name (Stonewall, 2023).
Gay	Commonly used as a term for individuals whose sexual orientation is to others of the same gender (Koenig, 2019).
Gender identity	An individual's innate sense of their gender, which may not correspond to the sex assigned at birth (Stonewall, 2023).
Heteronormative	Conformity to culturally determined heterosexual roles and assumption that heterosexuality is the normative and natural sexual orientation (Habarth, 2015).
Heterosexual	Commonly referred to as straight, a man or women who is sexually and romantically attracted to the opposite sex (Stonewall, 2023)
Lesbian	A woman who has a romantic, emotional, or sexual attraction towards women (Stonewall, 2023).
Non-binary	An umbrella term for a person who does not identify exclusively into one binary gender category (Mermaids, 2023).
Outed	When an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity is disclosed to others without their consent (Stonewall, 2023)
Pansexual	An individual's romantic/sexual attraction to others is not limited by gender or sex (Stonewall, 2023).
Queer	People who want to reject specific labels regarding their gender and/or sexual orientation, indicating they are not heterosexual (Stonewall, 2023).
Sexual Orientation	Someone's attraction to another person, on a physical, emotional, romantic or sexual level (Koenig, 2019).
Trans	An umbrella term encompassing identities that extend gender norms (Koenig, 2019).
Transgender	A person whose gender and/or gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth (Koenig, 2019).
Transitioning	A process a trans person may take when living in their gender (Stonewall, 2023).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In this literature review, I have define the key terminology used in this research project and explore the theoretical foundations of the research topic, examining the UK cultural context for the LGBTQ+ community and the UK school context. I will consider the protective factors of LGBTQ+ CYP and then explore the current research into young people's online engagement. Finally, I will discuss the importance and relevance of this research to Educational Psychologists (EPs).

My search strategy for relevant research began with key terms such as 'LGBT', 'sexual identity', 'LGBT Youth' and 'online harassment'. The initial areas I used then expanded as I engaged with more literature and gained a greater understanding of relevant topics. The new terms included; 'LGBTQ+', 'Queer', 'online communities' and 'protective factors'. I read relevant literature and did further reading of the authors cited in the initial literature, giving me a broad and critical range of relevant research. Finally, I engaged with research supervision to reflect on the literature and used a research table to note recurrent topics present in the literature, evident gaps in the literature, and gaps within my understanding of the topic area.

2.2 Defining Key Terminology

I did not want to impose external labels on individuals within the research project; I wanted to respect how people described and identified themselves. However, it was also important that the terms used throughout the thesis were clarified and understood to study the topic coherently. As I have focused my thesis on the experiences of a marginalised group, it is vital to acknowledge the potential of othering the participants, whereby I would have created a divide between non-dominant and dominant groups.

In the initial stages of the research's inception, I contemplated using the term 'non-straight'. However, through reflections with my research supervisor, I felt that the term was unclear and created a separation between straight and non-straight individuals. Particularly as Kosciw et al. (2015) outline that the use of specific labels and language to describe sexual and gender identities is

often empowering for young people, with Bates et al. (2020) further reinforcing the sense of empowerment young people have in choosing their own terminology for their identity.

Presenting participants or a community of individuals as 'others' is to, "reinforce their marginal status and their difference from 'Us'." (MacLure, 2003, p.4). MacLure (2003) presents the implications of binary oppositions, indicative of othering, suggesting it instils epistemic violence towards marginalised voices, which they indicate is unfortunately prominent across educational research. Epistemic violence is a term Spivak (1998) coined, describing the silencing of marginalised communities through language (Dotson, 2011). Hornsby (1994) outlines that the silencing of marginalised voices can be through the lack of reciprocity in dialogue, whereby researchers interpret the voices of marginalised groups to fit within their distinct categories of 'other' as opposed to hearing their voices and enabling the creation of new 'knowledge' or understanding. MacLure's (2003) research, however, only discusses othering at an individual level without referring to the influence that an environment or system may have, which Charteris et al. (2017) refer to as "structural marginalisation as a form of systemic othering" (p.105) in their literature examining the othering of teaching staff in school settings.

It is essential to acknowledge the influence of the researcher's identity in the role of othering research participants, particularly how a researcher's identity may enable reciprocity throughout the research process (Sikes & Goodson, 2003; MacLure, 2003). Therefore, I was open and honest about my identity with the participants and throughout this thesis to lessen Fine's (1994) definition of othering, described as imputing negative differences, because it is essential to recognise the power I hold in the role of a researcher. Instead of comparing LGBTQ+ students to heterosexual students, I wanted the study to listen to the voices of LGBTQ+ students in a field that seemingly lacks inclusivity and holds a heteronormative focus (Habarth, 2015; Porta et al. 2017; Formby, 2015). I have taken Sike's (2005) advice to "recognise that some of my concerns can probably not be relieved and to simply to do the best [I] can" (p.91 referenced in Smith & Deemer, 2000, p.891).

I adopted the terminology used by established youth charities that I had planned to seek advice and participant recruitment through, all of whom used the acronym LGBTQ+ which stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, Queer/questioning (Stonewall, 2023). I intended the plus symbol to represent all gender identities and sexual orientations. Koenig (2019), however, suggests caution in using specific definitions, as terminology is often defined and used differently by individuals. The LGBTQ+ acronym is not an all-inclusive list of possible identities research participants may use or explore in the research but is intended as a guide to indicate the participant criteria and support the reader.

The term 'online communities' is frequently referred to in research, although there are subtle differences in the details described, particularly in how researchers have defined what constitutes a 'community'. Some researchers have concentrated on the specific software used or the objective of the community (Preece, 2000). In contrast, other researchers, including Rheingold (1993) and Hiltz (1985), referenced camaraderie among online users. The specifics of defining community, according to Bruckman (2006), are not essential within research, instead encouraging researchers and relevant professionals to accept that online communities are "a concept with fuzzy boundaries that is perhaps more appropriately defined by its membership" (Preece & Maloney-Krichamar, 2005, p.1). Hammond (2017) echoes Bruckman's (2006) definition of membership, indicating that online communities are spaces where users access support through connection and empathy. Hiebert and Kortés-Miller (2021) explored the notion of online communities on the video-sharing platform TikTok. They argue that engagement with specific influencers and hashtags has in itself created an online community by providing space for gender and sexual minority youth to access support, develop connections and share specific knowledge. My research project focuses on any online communities that participants may have created or engaged with; it is not exploring a specific online platform or space. To demonstrate that online communities are defined by their members and are consistent with a broad range of different groups, I have utilised a general dictionary definition of online communities in this thesis defined as "a group of people who use a

particular internet service or belong to a particular group on the internet” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022).

2.3 Theoretical Foundations

Theory prominent in LGBTQ+ research has explored the cultural shifts in the use of language and terminology to describe gender and sexuality (Pinar, 2012). For example, Queer theory has advocated for the liberation of the LGBTQ+ community throughout history, utilising and reclaiming terminology such as ‘gay’ and ‘Queer’ to challenge societal perceptions and enable the empowerment of LGBTQ+ community members (Jagose, 1996).

Halperin (1995) suggests that anyone who feels excluded due to their sexuality can claim a Queer identity. Queer theory focuses on individuals who feel marginalised, contesting the concept of fitting in and what society believes that should look like (Gore 2021; Warner, 1993). Queer theory interrogates the roles of specific categories and binaries, suggesting that presenting these groupings means that those who do not identify with those groups are further marginalised (Sullivan, 2003). The theory portrays continued marginalisation through essentialist categories considered fixed and static, which are used to perpetuate cis-heteronormative values (Marinucci, 2016). Pinar (2012) calls for the inclusion of Queer understanding and theory in education because of the necessary role it may have in “challenging homophobic and heterosexist nonsense” (p. 2) present in the education system. It is important to note that Pinar’s (2012) research is based within the USA, where attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community and the education system differ from the UK, where this research project is based.

Elliot (2010) draws attention to the caution needed by researchers acknowledging their own positionality and identity when engaging with theoretical understanding. Elliot (2010) highlighted the significantly different stakes for trans and non-trans persons when theorising about the lives of transgender individuals. Butler (2004) pinpoints the political and cultural implications of considering lived experiences that do not reflect your own, emphasising the need for researchers to reflect on their positions, highlighting that “a nonviolent encounter with others requires an acceptance of

one's own ignorance about the other, and a willingness to question and expand one's conception of humanness" (Butler, 2004, p.38). Billington (1995) additionally emphasises the importance of psychologists acknowledging their privilege and power; whilst this sentiment was not specific towards members of the LGBTQ+ community, I feel that it is very relevant. I am conscious of the privilege I have inherited as a white cisgender female, particularly in feminist spaces where the needs of white cisgender women have often been prioritised over the need for intersectionality, at the detriment of those existing outside of these identities (Carasthathis, 2014; Yuval-Davis, 2006b; Evans, 2016; Ferreday, 2017). Intersectional feminism aims to centralise the experiences of people who have been marginalised by society through heteronormative societal standards (Parent, DeBlaere & Moradi, 2013). However, feminism is still primarily associated with the early transphobic views of Raymond (1979) (Elliot, 2010). Raymond (1979) called for the exclusion of trans-women in women-only spaces and the more recent rise of trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs), whose discussions have catapulted into the mainstream, reinforcing cisnormativity and questioning the authenticity of the trans community (Williams, 2014; Worthen, 2022; Elliot, 2010). Acknowledging the tensions between some aspects of feminist theory and the transgender community, alongside the awareness of my positionality, meant that I did not feel it was appropriate to use intersectional feminism as a critical lens for the research project.

Feminism is arguably critical of Queer theory's aim to break down society's understanding of a static and binary understanding of gender because it may jeopardise collective understandings of gender and the specific challenges marginalised genders face (Richardson et al., 2006). However, Humphrey (1999) argues that a binary understanding of gender and sexuality disregards all individuals who do not identify with a monosexuality; defined as an individual who is romantically and sexually attracted to members of one sex or gender only (Fuller, 2020). McCann (2022) is critical of the distinct absence of bisexuality in key Queer theory literature, specifically, Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), stating the absence of attention to plurisexualities, defined as individuals who are romantically or sexually attracted to more than one gender or sex, strengthens a binary

understanding of sexuality which encourages the presence of homophobia and heteronormativity in society. Furthermore, Green (2004) and Hausman (2001) suggest that Queer theory maintains a binary understanding of gender roles. Transgender theory, however, understands gender as fluid and encourages a positive view of empowering transgender individuals existing outside of society's conventional gender roles and enabling consideration of intersectionality in marginalised identities (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010).

Utilising both Queer and transgender theory as a critical lens, with specific attention to the intersectionality of identities, I wanted to examine the experiences of young adults who are LGBTQ+ existing amongst hetero/cisnormative educational systems. I felt that these combined lenses would allow me to focus on marginalisation while allowing for fluidity rather than essentialism.

2.4 The UK Cultural Context

A large-scale research project based in the UK, Portugal and Germany, based on responses from a large international LGBT+ survey was analysed; 6,592 respondents were from the UK, and responses indicated that LGBT identities were strong predictors of harassment and violence, with 55% of respondents identifying daily experiences of discrimination in the UK (Bayrakdar & King, 2023). Bayrakdar and King (2023) identified the need to acknowledge the intersectionality of an individual's identity, outlining the increased risk individuals can face. Bayrakdar and King's (2023) research was, however, based upon a large-scale quantitative survey, which Almeida et al. (2017) explored the limitations of, particularly that the rigidity of questions would not allow for a participant's emotions to be conveyed or greater understanding of the context that surrounds their response. Overlooking the environmental or emotional context is likely to create a narrow understanding of the participant's experiences whilst also preventing participants from sharing contributing factors of their experiences. The use of structured online surveys may limit the recruitment of participants to only those with access to internet-enabled technology and perhaps predisposes participants to understand the survey questions similarly.

Within a broader global context, Pedulla (2014) emphasised the need for researchers to acknowledge the intersectionality of individual identities, highlighting that individuals who are LGBTQ+ with a religious minority status were linked to experiencing higher levels of discrimination. Rahman and Valliani (2017) stressed the need to understand LGBT Muslim identities in the UK to challenge Western perspectives of Islamic culture and how individuals who identify as LGBT may fit within traditions and culture.

Hubbard's (2021) hate crime report indicated that 64% of LGBTQ+ people had experienced anti-LGBTQ+ violence and abuse in the UK, indicating that the UK's current cultural context for members of the LGBTQ+ community is likely to include experiences of harassment and abuse. Bain and Podmore's (2020) research presented that individuals whose identities resist a heteronormative standard are further marginalised and discriminated against, suggesting the UK further perpetuates heteronormative societal standards. McMahon (2022) outlined that the UK's binary understanding of sexuality and gender reinforces specific understandings of gender roles and behaviour, which can, in turn, impact how LGBTQ+ individuals conceptualise their relationships and understand healthy relationships. Donovan and Hester (2014) echoed McMahon's (2022) research suggesting that society's heteronormative framework can encourage incidents of homophobia to reinforce gender ideals, particularly of masculinity which Graaf (2021) proposed has enabled a societal acceptance and complicity in gender-based violence. Greene et al. (2015) highlighted the difficulties individuals in LGBTQ+ relationships face in understanding what may be healthy or acceptable, given the absence of role models or representation in mainstream media. Greene et al. (2015) did, however, recommend caution in presenting non-heterosexual relationships as synonymous with risk, highlighting the positive and fulfilling experiences many individuals have in LGBTQ+ relationships and recommending a greater understanding of information sought from the internet and the relationships formed through social media platforms amongst LGBTQ+ youth.

Stonewall, a UK LGBTQ+ equality charity, noted that increased visibility of LGBTQ+ people and relationships led to an increase in acceptance and inclusion in the UK (Bachmann & Gooch,

2018). Maine (2022) outlined significant progress in the UK with civil and criminal laws to protect the LGBTQ+ community; however, they found that members of the LGBTQ+ community continue to anticipate incidents of discrimination based on their LGBTQ+ identity. Browne and Nash (2015) suggested that “resistance to LGBT equalities is entrenched in Britain and indeed is developing” (p. 327). The entrenched resistance is present despite substantial advancement to the legal rights of LGBTQ+ individuals in the UK, which has provided individuals with a stronger voice and presence in legislation and human rights frameworks (Taylor, 2011). The increased legal protection of the LGBTQ+ community includes the introduction of the Marriage Act (2013), enabling same-sex or gender couples to marry, alongside the protection of gender and sexual minorities through the Equality Act (2010).

Lawrence and Taylor (2020) examined the UK’s attitudes towards members of the LGBTQ+ community through discussions about the LGBT Action Plan Policy (Government Equalities Office, 2018), which appeared to be positioned as a “celebratory rhetoric of lives getting better” (Lawrence & Taylor, 2020, p. 586). Researchers highlight the irony of a Conservative government declaring the UK as a world leader in LGBTQ+ rights through the LGBT Action Plan Policy (Government Equalities Office, 2018) yet, failing to address the impact caused by their party implementing the Section 28 Local Government Act (1988) (Lawrence & Taylor, 2020; Bacci, 2009). Section 28 explicitly banned the promotion of homosexuality in local authorities, including within educational settings, which resulted in the removal of local support centres and a distinct absence of support for the LGBTQ+ community (Almack & King, 2019; Lee, 2019). Ellis and High’s (2004) research outlined that Section 28 promoted a culture of stigma and fear towards individuals who were LGBTQ+. Fletcher (2022) described the difficulties they faced growing up in the 1980s as a member of the LGBTQ+ community in the UK, explaining that their experiences were isolating and included regular incidents of homophobic bullying. Despite the UK government repealing Section 28 in 2003, environments of heteronormativity have a sustained presence within UK educational settings, with the lasting impact of the legislation still present in teaching practice (Johnson, 2023).

2.5 The School Context

Johnson's (2023) research indicated that even teaching staff who are vocal about their advocacy for school-wide inclusion of LGBTQ+ students reinforce heteronormative ideals.

Heteronormative ideals are displayed through their concerns that discussions around gender and sexuality are inappropriate for school settings, alongside fear that other staff, and parents and carers may perceive their advocacy as pushing a Queer agenda. Johnson's (2023) research utilises Foucault's (1977) model of the panopticon, whereby the culture of ongoing expectations placed on teaching staff leads to self-policing of behaviour to conform to the ideals that have been placed upon them in school settings, subsequently allowing heteronormativity to act as a prime force to structure school culture (Perryman, 2006). The heteronormative focus is reinforced not only by wider systems, which may be understood at the Exosystemic level in Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1968), but also by parents, carers and other staff, which are predominantly at the micro and mesosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). Johnson's (2023) research methodology uses Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which requires homogeneity across participants (Tuffour, 2017). However, See and Hunt (2011) suggest that presenting LGBTQ+ young people as a homogenous group can lead to overly reductionist implications and can perpetuate a view that young people who are LGBTQ+ all have the same needs, which can result in tokenistic or overly generalised support.

Ganascia (2009) outlined the role internet platforms have in the understanding of the panopticon framework, stating that through engagement with these online spaces, both staff and students are increasingly subjected to ongoing surveillance from others, which has the potential to either support the resistance or exacerbate conformity to heteronormative ideals. Kuhar (2011) explored the notion of a heteronormative panopticon and highlighted that a consistent heteronormative stance in environments such as school is achieved through subtle and persistent control. However, Kuhar's (2011) research was centred around shifting the understanding of sexuality away from a solely Western perspective, focusing on the perspectives in Eastern Europe, where attitudes and understanding of the LGBTQ+ community are likely to differ substantially from

the UK. The concept of internalised surveillance in perpetuating heteronormative school environments suggests that teaching staff cannot consistently provide open discussions about gender and sexuality or contribute to creating a sense of inclusion or safety for LGBTQ+ students (Llewellyn & Reynolds, 2021; Reimers, 2020; Gray, 2013).

The implications of a heteronormative school environment are well documented across the literature, with the links between heteronormativity and the prevalence of homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia within school settings often cited (DePalma & Jennett, 2010; Formby, 2015). McDermott et al.'s. (2023) UK-based research study positioned schools as significant risk factors for LGBTQ+ young people with exposure to violence and discrimination based on gender and sexuality and an absence of consistent and well-planned support, leading to adverse mental health outcomes. Cohen et al.'s. (2023) research, whilst based in the USA, emphasises the sentiments of McDermott et al. (2023), suggesting that school environments are not safe spaces for LGBTQ+ young people, as schools foster hopelessness and isolation, which often has a detrimental impact on young people's access to academic learning and their emotional wellbeing.

Rivers (2011) outlined the damaging impact homophobic bullying and discrimination towards students who are LGBTQ+ has towards access to learning, with a significant correlation between LGBTQ+ discrimination and poorer academic outcomes. LGBTQ+ CYP in the UK are at an increased risk of experiencing prolonged anxiety, depression, substance misuse, and developing low self-esteem than their heterosexual counterparts (ONS, 2017; Stonewall, 2017). O'Donoghue (2019) proposed the explicit role of young men utilising homophobia to regulate acceptable masculinity, perpetuating ideals of aggression and violence, demonstrating that the continuous use of homophobia has further systemic implications.

On a global level, it is estimated that LGBTQ+ young people are the most likely demographic of young people to have persistent suicidal thoughts and take steps to end their lives (McDermott & Roen, 2016). Marzetti et al. (2022) conducted qualitative research into the experiences of suicidal ideation amongst LGBTQ+ young people, summarising that the profound feelings of rejection and

pressure to conform experienced in school were often the trigger. In addition, Stonewall identified that 70% of young people who are LGBTQ+ felt their lives were not worth living, with 12% having taken steps to end their lives (Bachmann & Gooch, 2018). Marzetti et al. (2022) called for further qualitative research that acknowledges the intersectionality of young people's identities and explores the protective factors present in the lives of LGBTQ+ young people.

LGBTQ+ students have been reported to experience high levels of isolation as well as family and peer rejection (McInroy et al. 2019). The negative experiences are compounded by Du Bois' (1903) notion of double consciousness, whereby a marginalised group must create a sense of self yet remain cautious of how they may be perceived by those marginalising them, which can create immense difficulty for young people in disclosing their LGBTQ+ identity (Johnson, 2023). Young people who do not feel safe or able to come out or share their gender and sexual identities with others have been strongly associated with low attendance at school, depression and self-harm (Formby, 2013; Catalpa & McGuire, 2018).

2.6 Protective Factors For LGBTQ+ Young People

Research exploring the experiences of LGBTQ+ young people is predominantly saturated with references to harassment and discrimination (Allen, 2019). However, the preoccupation with the harm that the LGBTQ+ community faces arguably positions the group as 'at risk', creating a binary between LGBTQ+ youth as victims and then other young people, leading to a narrative of unavoidable vulnerability and victimisation of LGBTQ+ young people (Cover, 2012; Rasmussen, 2006; Kosciw et al., 2014).

There is limited research exploring the strengths and protective factors of LGBTQ+ CYP navigating educational settings (Higa et al., 2014). However, Murphy (2012) and Reimers (2020) outlined the positive impact of staff visibility and engagement in open and ongoing discussions regarding sexual and gender identities. The disruption to dominant heteronormative presentations in educational settings is essential. The presence of Queer bodies in school settings, particularly in teaching and learning staff, supports a much-needed resistance against heterosexual norms and

encourages greater acceptance for all CYP (Reimers, 2020). Formby (2013) suggested that the inclusion of LGBTQ+ education across the UK curriculum is an important approach to increasing visibility and supporting acceptance and diversity in education. The UK Government mandated RSE in 2019, including LGBTQ+ inclusive education. However, Elia and Eliason (2010) highlighted that RSE is traditionally delivered from a heterocentric perspective. Due to the extensive experiences of LGBTQ+ discrimination, CYP often struggle to share their views or ask questions, further perpetuating heterocentric approaches (Chin et al., 2012). It is, however, empowering for LGBTQ+ CYP to be consulted on their views on RSE content and how teaching staff can effectively deliver inclusive RSE curriculum (Hoefer & Hoefer, 2017; Coll et al., 2018; Epps et al., 2021).

Access to safe, supportive and inclusive learning and social environments was noted by Wilson and Cariola (2020) as a strong supportive factor, with particular emphasis on the positive impact peer support groups had on young people's mental health. As indicated previously in this literature review, CYP who are LGBTQ+ are at greater risk of experiencing violence and abuse in intimate relationships; however, access to close friendships is considered a robust and efficient source of support, with CYP more likely to trust friends than adults (Donovan & Hester, 2014). McDermott's (2015) research drew on international findings, which highlighted the important role of online friends and groups for LGBTQ+ youth, indicating that the support sought from online spaces was a significant supportive and protective factor for CYP. In addition, the presence of online LGBTQ+ communities has the potential to create feelings of belonging and community that often CYP who are LGBTQ+ do not consistently have access to, alongside access to practical information and support for mental health and wellbeing (Steinke et al., 2017).

2.7 Engagement Online Among LGBTQ+ Youth

The UK government is paying specific attention to the cultural context around online harm through the proposed Online Safety Bill, which will legislate a statutory obligation to protect CYP online, in an attempt to limit online abuse and exposure to illegal content (Parliamentary Bills, 2023). The bill was drafted in May 2021 and, at the time of writing this thesis, is in the House of

Lords. Trengove et al. (2022) described the difficulties in defining what content may cause harm and the need for legislation to balance protection and removing freedom. Furthermore, as the trans community continues to be vilified by the mass media and further marginalised in the UK and USA (Malatino, 2020), the bill's role in protecting individuals who are trans appears unclear and complex (Coe, 2022; McLean, 2021; Faye, 2021). There are clear complexities when considering the current UK context of CYP's online engagement. The Department for Education (DfE) has included the mandatory inclusion of online safety into the RSE curriculum, which incorporates the explicit teaching of online harm (DfE, 2019). However, for the RSE curriculum to successfully respond to the needs of all CYP, particularly LGBTQ+ CYP, it is essential to understand how online spaces are experienced and used (Veer, 2022; Peel et al., 2023).

Research exploring the culture of sexual harassment in UK educational settings outlined the significantly high rates of online image-based sexual harassment amongst CYP in UK schools (Ringrose et al., 2021). Ringrose et al. (2021) propose that persistent heteronormative ideals of masculinity led to extensive non-consensual sharing of explicit images and sending unsolicited explicit photographs to gain popularity among peers. Ringrose et al.'s (2021) research found a lack of understanding across CYP of what constituted harmful behaviours online and reflected the normalisation of online-based harassment. They called for further research to explore the experiences of LGBTQ+ CYP to gain a more inclusive understanding of potential issues online. Ofsted's rapid review of sexual harassment in UK educational settings identified an overwhelming prevalence of online-based sexual harm and identified that the experiences of LGBTQ+ CYP were distinctly lacking from their review (Ofsted, 2021). In addition to experiences of sexual harm online, Hubbard (2020) reviewed the prevalence of anti-LGBTQ+ hate young people are subjected to online, which their findings suggested had offline consequences, with online hate often leading to social isolation, internalised homophobia and hatred or rejection of identities. Keighley (2022) depicted the interplay between online and offline experiences, with online hate frequently resulting in CYP feeling fearful and therefore attempting to manage the way they present their gender or sexual

identities in an attempt to conform to cisgender and heterosexual norms as a form of self-protection. However, both Keighley's (2022) and Hubbard's (2020) research are based on quantitative data, where the space for participants to detail the positive experiences of online spaces was not provided. Both studies also predominantly focused on experiences of harm.

Peel et al. (2023) recognise the importance of support systems for LGBTQ+ CYP in promoting resilience and acceptance; their research, however, was centred on the healthcare systems and called for further research into the support systems utilised in education and what CYP perceive to constitute as a support system. As previously addressed, LGBTQ+ CYP often experience ongoing discrimination; however, online spaces and communities can offer acceptance and access to relationships and a sense of belonging (De Ridder & Van Bauwel, 2015; Stonewall & Childnet International, 2021; McInroy et al., 2019). A large-scale quantitative review identified that 90% of young people who are LGBT stated that online they could be themselves, with a further 95% indicating that online spaces provided them with positive role models (Stonewall and Childnet International, 2021). The fixed and static nature of large-scale surveys enables a greater number of participants in the research. However, it does not allow participants to share their experiences or articulate the importance of online spaces or their challenges.

Hiebert and Kortés-Miller (2021) researched the presence of online communities on TikTok; whilst the research was not based in the UK, it provided useful insight into the role social media platforms may have in providing a sense of community online for CYP who are LGBTQ+. Hiebert and Kortés-Miller (2021) suggested that focus and specific engagement in certain topics, such as following LGBT hashtags, enables users to create an online community which supports a reduction in isolation and shame related to their identity. Winstone et al. (2021) reported on the social connectedness present when using social media; while their research was not specific to the LGBTQ+ community, it provided valuable findings in identifying the potential strengths of engaging in online communities, with social connectedness positively correlating with positive mental health outcomes. Winstone et al. (2021) addressed the risk discourse that young people feel social media is spoken

about within, with participants feeling that adults solely focused on the dangers of being online and did not consider their views about the importance or the positives of social media.

There is a distinct absence of UK-based qualitative research exploring the positives of online communities or the role of online communities for LGBTQ+ CYP. There is a preoccupation throughout pre-existing research to position online communities as unsafe or damaging for CYP (Marston, 2019; Powell et al., 2020; Peel et al., 2023).

2.8 The Role of Educational Psychologists

In considering the importance my research topic has to the role of EPs, I think it is crucial to note that “Educational Psychology seems to be a rather mysterious profession” (Birch et al., 2015, p.3) with differences in the priorities and approaches to professional practice. For example, a polarising and contentious debate on EPNET (an Educational Psychology mailing forum for Educational Psychologists and educational professionals) in March 2023 conveyed the profoundly varying approaches to practice amongst practitioners when considering young people who are transgender. Whilst my response to the online discourse was shock and sadness at the volume of opposition in accepting and supporting individuals who are transgender, I recognise that my understanding of the EP role will likely differ from other professionals. However, there are core components of the profession that indicate both the importance and relevance of my research topic.

If a young person is experiencing discrimination, it is very unlikely they will feel physically or emotionally safe in an educational setting and, therefore, may encounter difficulties accessing their learning (Pepper & Brill, 2008). Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (1943) conveys the fundamental importance of young people having their basic needs met, including their need to feel safe and experience a sense of belonging in their school community before they are able to access their learning.

Formby (2013) outlined the positive impact a school-wide policy can have on young people who are LGBTQ+, highlighting the ability educational settings have to foster a safe and inclusive school environment when consideration is made of school policies and staff responses to

discrimination (Payne & Smith, 2011). Campbell et al. (2022) further emphasised the importance of educational settings fostering genuine inclusion; their research indicated that appropriately handling discrimination and whole-school approaches to LGBTQ+ topics positively correlated with increased academic engagement amongst LGBTQ+ students.

EPs are placed in a unique role within education due to their ability to provide interventions and support at individual, school and family levels. EP support can provide vital contributions to addressing barriers to education, experiences of distress, and supporting possible systemic needs of educational settings (Ruttledge, 2022), which draws upon the commonly held understanding of EPs as “agents of change” (Dunsmuir & Kratochill, 2013, p. 61). The British Psychological Society (BPS) (2022) has indicated that supporting teaching staff and educational settings in developing good practice through inclusive practice and policy is integral to the role. EPs need to work systemically and support settings at a whole school level (Weare, 2015; Gillham, 1978).

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009) stated that “EP’s may provide consultancy support to tackle sexist, sexual or transphobic bullying in schools” (p.39). Despite the guidance being made fourteen years ago, the Women’s Equalities Committee (2016) called for more support for LGBTQ+ young people in schools, highlighting that students who are transgender have limited access to EP support. EPs can support school staff in discussing gender identity and consider the impact and approaches to bullying, discrimination and stigma (Yavuz 2016; Holdsworth, 2017; Lowe, 2020).

Billington (2000) indicated that EPs have a crucial role in representing and advocating for the voice of CYP whose identities are marginalised by society, further emphasised by the BPS (2015), which states that listening to the voice and views of CYP is key to the role of EPs. Therefore, to effectively gather the views of LGBTQ+ CYP, consideration and time must be made to understand possible sources of support and areas of engagement, such as online communities.

Acknowledging the importance and impact belonging has for CYP (McMillian & Chavis, 1986), EPs need to engage in research and a broader understanding of how LGBTQ+ CYP, who

regularly face isolation and discrimination in educational settings, may have their need for connection met. EPs must resist further problematisation of the LGBTQ+ community and instead explore protective factors and areas of strength.

2.9 Summary and Rationale

Wilson and Cariola's (2020) systematic review of qualitative research in LGBTQ+ youth and mental health recommended further research on the role of online spaces and the internet for CYP in accessing support. Wilson and Cariola (2020) called explicitly for research that explores the contextual and ecological systems that surround CYP, with a central focus on creating strengths-based research to enable a greater understanding of the protective factors that may exist for LGBTQ+ youth. Similarly, Higa et al's. (2014) research exploring the negative and positive factors associated with wellbeing among LGBTQ+ youth, identified a need for future research that utilises Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1995). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1995) is a framework I have used to explore the participant's experiences in the thesis. Higa et al. (2014) proposed a need for further research that enabled a greater understanding of the influence a CYP's context and environment may have on their experiences.

Many LGBTQ+ CYP have not had the opportunity to engage with research, particularly individuals who are transgender (Holdsworth, 2017), and there is a pivotal role for EPs to engage with CYP who are LGBTQ+ in order to understand better how to support all CYP and their educational settings (Gavin, 2021; Yavuz, 2016; Evans & Rawlings, 2021). EPs have a role in supporting students and providing guidance and training at a whole school level (Ross et al., 2002). Therefore, there is an evident need for research exploring this topic in Educational Psychology.

There is a distinct lack of qualitative research based in the UK that has explored the experiences of online communities among LGBTQ+ youth, or during the period CYP attended an educational setting. I searched for relevant research on 'Web of Science' and 'Star Plus' academic search engines and found two relevant studies: Taylor et al. (2014) and Downing (2013). Downing's (2013) research explored the experiences of LGBTQ+ young adults and youth workers on social

networking sites designed for LGBT users, with findings indicating participants defined these spaces as online communities. Downing's (2013) research was specifically looking at socio-sexual relations online; attention was given to the environmental and contextual impact due to the research field being Geography and Environmental Science. However, there was little discussion from the research findings on educational settings, with the only reference being the absence of sex education. Taylor et al. (2014) explored the experiences of how Queer Christian youth present their identities online on Facebook. However, participants ranged in age from 17 to 34 years old; the research, therefore, faced limitations in how the term youth was defined. Taylor et al. (2014) explored the positive experiences of engagement in online communities; however, they focused on the online platform Facebook, which is predominantly now a social media platform used by older adults, with young people typically using platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and Snapchat (Smith & Short, 2022).

Over the ten years since these two studies, there have been considerable changes in the popularity and use of social media platforms and legislative changes in the UK, such as the mandatory inclusion of LGBTQ+ inclusive in the RSE curriculum. Therefore, I hoped to build upon this research by speaking with young adults aged 18-21 who are LGBTQ+ about their experiences of online communities during the period they attended an educational setting. I hoped to elicit relevant and new understanding, which could inform educational practice to ensure LGBTQ+ CYP are better supported. I additionally hoped a clear age range of 18-21 would limit complexities like those faced by Taylor et al. (2014) through their broad age range of participants, encompassing ages that EPs work with, who have recent experience of attending an educational setting but will not require parental or carer consent to participate, thereby enabling participants who may not be out to participate.

2.10 Research Question

I intend to answer the following research question through this research project:

How do young adults who are LGBTQ+ experience online communities during the period they attend an educational setting?

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Methodology Overview

In this chapter, I discuss the ontological and epistemological positioning I have taken and the implications for this research. I outline my methodological decisions and the foundations upon which I have based this research.

3.2 Ontological and Epistemological Position

The literature review explored the plethora of research examining the experiences of students who are LGBTQ+ (Powell et al., 2020; Bradlow et al., 2017; McInroy et al., 2019). However, as addressed in previous chapters, there is a distinct absence of research gathering the views of young adults who are LGBTQ+ that is not solely situated in a risk discourse (Allen, 2019). The lack of research exploring the views of young adults who are LGBTQ+, open to hearing their experiences as opposed to further perpetuating a narrative of risk, particularly regarding online communities, made me carefully consider the ontological positioning of my research. Alongside my desire to ensure that the research created a space to hear experiences, I was conscious of Warner's (2004) warning regarding the need for researchers to acknowledge the oppression the LGBTQ+ community has previously faced in psychological research. Kameney (1965) emphasised that emancipatory research around LGBTQ+ topics relies on the good faith of the LGBTQ+ community; therefore, careful consideration is needed towards emancipatory endeavours. Ensuring I reflected on the power and privilege I held throughout the inception of the research urged me to consider my ontological and epistemological position carefully.

Guna and Lincoln (1994) refer to ontology as the "nature of reality" (p. 109). Ontologies are often considered on a continuum, with relativism and realism at opposite ends (Sparkes & Smith, 2014; Crotty, 1998). At the furthest end of realism, the position suggests a single fixed reality independent of human experience and interpretation (Gray, 2009; Maxwell, 2011). A relativist perspective on the polar opposite of the continuum presents reality as dependent on context and individual experiences, whereby multiple realities co-exist (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Epistemology is

understood as “how we come to know something” (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p. 27); it is concerned with the relationship between the knowledge and the observer and how the knowledge is known (Howell, 2012). If epistemology is also considered on a continuum, positivism would sit on one end, with constructionism/interpretivism on the other. Positivism conveys truths that can be discovered and measured objectively (Proctor, 1998). Whereas constructionism states that knowledge is based upon human interactions, individual experiences and context, thereby outlining that there is not one set truth (Frosh, 2010)

My research is based on a critical realist ontology and epistemology situated between realism and constructivism (Levers, 2013; Sims-Schouten et al., 2007). A critical realist position accepts that a reality exists independently of individual experience but cannot be accessed in its totality (O’Mahoney & Vincent, 2014; Taylor, 2018). Bhaskar (2013) notes that critical realism supports a researcher’s ability to recognise and accept that the structures and mechanisms that affect individual experiences are real. Acknowledging the impact social structures have on perceptions and worldviews was an important aspect of why I was drawn to critical realism (Archer, 1995).

My critical realist stance embraces a realist ontology, arguing in support of a real world that contains “causal powers or potentialities” (Bhaskar, 2013, XVIII). The realist aspect of my ontology enables me to recognise that the structures and barriers present in the participants’ lives and their identities are real. My ontological position presents that an individual’s understanding of the world is deeply influenced by aspects of an external reality, including “personal-social histories” and “the power of institutions” (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999, p. 2). A critical realism position presents that the power structures and inequality present in society, for example though; socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, and race, significantly influence how the world is understood and how individuals respond to events (Bunge, 1993). My research rationale indicated the presence of power and oppression for LGBTQ+ CYP, highlighting the relevance of this positionality. My research is based on a critical realist epistemology that recognises everyone’s subjective reality and insight of the

world is shaped by the real cultural and historical structures and systems within which they are situated (Willig, 2013).

I felt that using a critical realist positioning would better enable me to consider the structures and barriers participants may discuss as real. In addition, as participants in this research are from marginalised communities (Nelson, 2020), I felt it was important that the research gave credence to how participants define their identities and any societal structures they may describe as barriers to them.

I ensured that the critical realist position guided all decisions throughout the research, including selecting a research methodology, an aspect of research Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) indicate is essential. The power dynamic between myself, the researcher, and the participants was a significant reflection area for me in making fundamental decisions about the research methodology. Therefore, as discussed in my literature review, I have used Queer and transgender theories as a critical lens throughout the research project. Rutzou (2018) discussed that Queer theory deeply resonates with critical realism, presenting the impact of an individual's lived experience on their perception of the world yet recognising the complex structure and systems in society that cannot be fully understood.

3.3 Selecting a Method

Having completed quantitative and qualitative research during my undergraduate and postgraduate studies, I leaned much more strongly towards a qualitative research methodology. I wanted to ensure the methodological approach was consistent with my philosophical positioning to strengthen my capability to explore the research question (Holloway & Todres, 2003). Furthermore, qualitative research is interested in a deeper and more open exploration of research topics (Pathak et al., 2013) with a small group of participants (Yardley, 2000). Using a qualitative approach would provide the greatest opportunity for allowing participants to share their stories in a research project seeking social justice, in keeping with the emancipatory conceptualisation of the project.

My own lived experiences, identity and cultural realities will have impacted how I understood the stories participants told me and how I interpreted these. I acknowledge my influence on the data and the co-construction within the narrative interviews. As a result, my analysis reflects one interpretation of the data. I aimed to represent the stories I was told and present one possible way of exploring the participant's narratives.

3.4 Rejecting Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

IPA aims to explore how participants understand their lived experiences (Willig, 2013), consistent with the critical realist positionality in this research project. The importance placed on reflexivity and being "aware of one's own bias" (Gadamer, 2006, p.272) made me feel IPA may have been a well-suited approach for the research project. However, I was concerned about the "double hermeneutic" approach, a core element of IPA (Willig, 2013, p.87), whereby the researcher attempts to "make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them" (Smith, 2011, p. 10). I was concerned the approach would centralise me in the research rather than the participant's stories, which I felt conflicted with the research's emancipatory aims.

The idiographic approach, a key principle in IPA, assumes and seeks homogeneity among the participants; discovering shared themes across all interviews is focal to IPA (Nuttall & Woods, 2013; Tuffour, 2017). However, as my literature review outlines, much of the pre-existing research with LGBTQ+ young adults presents LGBTQ+ individuals as a homogeneous group with similar needs, who are frequently situated within a discourse of risk and danger (Rivers, 2011; Formby & Donovan, 2020). Allen's (2019) research explored the perspective of heterosexual students witnessing homophobia, identifying the actions needed to understand the presence of homophobia in schools whilst attempting to resist a victim and perpetrator binary to gain a better understanding of systemic issues. Allen (2019) reported that when individuals who are LGBTQ+ are presented as a homogeneous group, it prevents those who may exist outside of the LGBTQ+ community from understanding the impact of heteronormative schools and thus actively listening to the LGBTQ+ experience. I, therefore, felt strongly that this research project should not perpetuate a narrative

that young adults who are LGBTQ+ are a homogenous group. Mertens (2015) suggests that IPA strives to give voice to a specific experience or event. However, Riessman (1993) suggests that research cannot give voice; proposing that as researchers, we are presented with representations of an individual experience rather than accessing it directly.

I subsequently rejected IPA, as I did not feel it fit my hopes to centralise the participant voices and acknowledge the heterogeneity of LGBTQ+ young people's experiences.

3.5 Narrative Approach

Narrative research allows a focus on subjective meaning-making alongside a critical exploration of broader social and cultural factors (Emerson & Frosh, 2004; Gilligan et al., 2006). Narrative methodology outlines that sharing stories is necessary for social and cultural processes to structure human experiences (Hiles et al., 2017). Further, narrative research focuses on how individuals make sense of their experiences, including relationships (Toleman & Head, 2021). McLean et al. (2013) outlined the ability narratives have to "shed light on the intersections of the individuals and his or her familial and cultural contexts" (p. 433). I felt that the acknowledgement of the impact interactions have on a narrative told was important and in keeping with the aims of my research project.

Culturally orientated narrative approaches recognise the impact of social-cultural environments (Riessman, 2008; Loots et al., 2013), differing from auto-biographical narratives that present singular, unified, and linear narratives (Bruner, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1995). Hollway and Jefferson (2013) provide a valuable critique of the latter approach defining it as a "transparent account problem" (p. 3) whereby there is an assumed connection between experience and language within narratives, and the researcher can obtain a transparent meaning from reading the narratives. The concept of a transparent reading negates the impact of the research's social context. In contrast, Riessman (2002) describes the concept of narratives as individuals performing their preferred identity, with the storyteller deciding how they convey themselves and others around them. Culturally orientated narratives are interested in the inclusion of polyphonic voices (Rogers, 2007),

where “the self is assumed to consist of a number of relatively autonomous spatial positions” (Loots et al., 2013 p. 109), acknowledging the impact of social context and power. Utilising a research approach that worked towards capturing the multiplicity within narratives interested me, and I felt it would fit most appropriately with the research aims. Through the research project, I aimed to consider how young adults who are LGBTQ+ experience online communities, and thereby I wanted to allow the research to consider multiple voices and positions. I considered the multiple ways in which participants may position themselves when discussing their experiences on and offline and the tensions or possible contradictions this may present in their narratives and identities. Therefore, I felt that acknowledging the polyphonic nature of narrative was important (Rogers, 2007).

A narrative approach often embraces intersubjectivity within the relational context of a narrative research project, with the researcher bringing their own experiences and stories (Gergen, 2015). The concept of intersubjectivity can provide additional strength to the research, whereby my personal experience in the research topic may allow me to understand better the stories shared by participants and support a shared understanding of the language used (Holloway & Biley, 2011). Furthermore, Riessman (2008) suggests that narratives are co-constructed between the researcher and the participant. I felt it was important that my research approach actively sought to draw attention to the influence I would bring to the narratives and interpretation, further confirming why a narrative approach was most suitable for my research.

The emancipatory aim of the research is an essential principle that I wanted to ensure I considered throughout all stages of the research, and I felt that a narrative methodology would support these aims. Pinar (2012) discussed how narrative methodologies that utilise Queer theory provide space to centralise the voices of individuals whom society has marginalised. Stories and, therefore, narratives are ubiquitous and are an essential means for people to reveal their feelings and experiences (Hiles et al., 2017), particularly as “enabling voice can be a potential source of empowerment” for individuals who live in marginalised positions (Nind et al., 2012 p.653).

3.6 Emancipatory Endeavour

Emancipatory research aims to generate information that will benefit and empower individuals whom society has marginalised and disadvantaged (Noel, 2016). An emancipatory perspective can incorporate a broad scope of critical theory to support a researcher in acknowledging their position of privilege in the research and supporting the research's aim to centralise the interests of the participant group, as I have strived to, through the use of Queer and transgender theories as critical lenses in my research project (McLaren & Giarelli, 1995).

Emancipatory research is similar to participatory research. Oliver (1997) describes the distinction as participatory research allowing previously excluded individuals to participate in research, whereas emancipatory research aims for change, to work towards individuals no longer being excluded in society. Emancipatory research is a vehicle for change and hope that aims to acknowledge and confront social oppression (Kiernan, 1999). However, Aldridge (2016) does describe the transformative potential of participatory research to invoke change, as it ensures that research is conducted with individuals rather than on individuals (Nind, 2014). I was aware of the constraints of positioning the research participants as co-researchers, given that I needed to author the thesis and include specific aspects to meet the requirements of a formal submission to meet my doctoral course requirements. However, I wanted to ensure that the inclusion of participants was not tokenistic and that it enabled empowerment and strove for change; therefore, I felt that an emancipatory aim was most appropriate.

I feel that emancipatory research embodies the notion of "Nothing About Us Without Us" (Charlton, 1998, p. 3), with the core functions focusing on research being open, empowering participants, enabling a reciprocal process, where the research benefits both the researcher and the participant, and the researcher is held accountable (Danieli & Woodham, 2007). The concept of accountability struck me, and I wanted to ensure that the decisions I made throughout the research process were in the best interests of LGBTQ+ CYP. Patton (1990) proposed that a core component of accountability in emancipatory research is that researchers recognise their membership in dominant

groups. Therefore, I have ensured I have remained transparent and open about my positionality and identity.

I was particularly interested in Margolin's (2017) perspective on emancipatory research, suggesting that the research process should 'de-elitise' knowledge and actively include participants instead of positioning them as visitors on a fleeting visit. I am, however, aware that my thesis is not written accessibly, particularly given the often academic language and length. I have therefore written a shorter accessible version of my thesis to ensure that the research participants can access the written element of the research project. I felt that, whilst the dissemination of my findings would be accessible, I wanted to ensure the participants had access to my whole thesis in an accessible format to ensure they remained an active and considered part of the research process. As previously discussed, my research is not generalisable, given the nature of narrative inquiry. Therefore, in order for the research to benefit and empower the participants through the generated information, as is the goal of emancipatory research, I feel that the participants must have access to the generated information (Appendix A).

Chapter 4: Design and Procedure

4.1 Procedure Overview

The following chapter details my research design and procedure. I discuss the ethical considerations, including the recruitment of participants, conducting interviews and the implications of my pilot study. I also share the considerations that have been used to reflect on the quality of the research. I conclude the chapter with details of how the data was collected and transcribed and the analysis technique used.

The research took place in the South East of England.

4.2 Ethics

The University of Sheffield ethics committee approved the research project (Appendix B). I ensured that all requirements identified in the ethics application were adhered to throughout the research process. In addition, the ethical approval and application ensured that I followed guidance stipulated for researchers by the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2018) and the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).

4.2.1 Participants

The number of desired participants depends on the research project being carried out. Narrative inquiry does not have a specified number of participants a researcher would be expected to recruit (Wells, 2011). I utilised an in-depth narrative approach, and my chosen analysis, The Listening Guide (Gilligan, 2015), which I will explore in more detail later in this chapter, provides a comprehensive and detailed view of the participant narratives. Therefore, I felt a small sample size would be most appropriate and practical.

I aimed to recruit three participants who were:

- Aged between 18 – 21 years old
- Identified as LGBTQ+
- Currently attending an educational setting or had attended an educational setting within the last five years

Due to the sensitive nature of the research topic, I wanted to use the pilot study to consider the appropriateness of my questions and prompts before conducting an interview with a participant who met the sampling criteria. Therefore, I aimed to carry out the pilot study with a professional who regularly works with young adults who are LGBTQ+ and identifies personally as LGBTQ+, so they are likely to have insight into the language used in the questions but also share their own experiences. In addition, I wanted to use the pilot study to explore further ways to reduce possible distress or harm to potential participants with another professional. Therefore, the pilot study criteria for participants was:

- A staff member or trained volunteer at an LGBTQ+ youth organisation. Or an individual who has previous experience working and supporting young adults who are LGBTQ+ in an educational setting
- Identifies as LGBTQ+

I had initially wanted my participant sampling to be younger, exploring the experiences of young adults who are still in an educational setting aged 16 and above, as a result of current research calling for a greater understanding of experiences of online harm amongst students who are LGBTQ+ (Ringrose et al., 2021). At the start of my research journey, I felt that including young people's voices was essential to the project. I was additionally unsure if the project would have a genuine emancipatory aim if I did not attempt to hear the stories of young people. Aldridge (2016) proposes that "children and young people have unique insights to offer" (p. 32). However, Alderson and Morrow (2011) raised important questions to consider, predominantly focusing on what value the research would bring to the young person and what the young person would gain from the participation. The power imbalance between myself and the participants was an area I have considered at length, and I concluded that including participants under 18 years old would not have been in their interest.

I felt that as the research was intended to be small-scale and to gather individual narratives, the potential harm of discussing online communities if participants did not have secure support

networks, outweighed the possible positive of the research creating a space to hear their stories. Additionally, as research guidance presents young people under 18 as vulnerable, I would have had to gather parental consent. I felt this would have been a practical barrier regarding time and access to participants, and it would have limited my participant sampling to only young people who were comfortable with their primary caregiver, knowing they are LGBTQ+.

Therefore, after discussions with my research supervisor, I felt that gathering the views of young adults aged 18-21 allowed for a greater chance of participants having created distance between any possible negative experiences whilst recent enough to recall their experiences of online communities. In addition, I felt that older participants might be more confident in articulating their narratives and therefore gain a greater sense of empowerment and benefit from participating in the research.

I wanted to include all types of educational settings in the criteria. However, an absence of more than five years may have indicated very difficult experiences in attending a setting, aside from a Covid-19 context, because the participants are above compulsory school leaving age, which may have been emotive for participants to discuss (Havik & Ingul, 2021). In addition, the prolonged time since attending a setting may have made recollection of experiences challenging. Therefore, I felt that the criteria of participants who were either still attending an educational setting or who have attended one in the last five years was appropriate.

4.2.2 Participant Recruitment

I created a research poster inviting potential participants (Appendix C), which I shared with LGBTQ+ youth groups in the Local Authority (LA) in which I am on placement. Although I had also contacted local youth groups to recruit a pilot participant, I received interest from a youth worker who had recently left the LA. They had connections with LGBTQ+ organisations in the South East of England. After our interview, the pilot participant shared the research poster with LGBTQ+ youth groups in the South East of England.

4.2.3 Research Participants

I had three participants express interest through the QR code on my research poster, leaving their contact details. I contacted all participants, introducing myself and the research. I sent all three participants the information sheet, and all expressed interest in participating. All the participants were from the South East of England, across different but neighbouring counties.

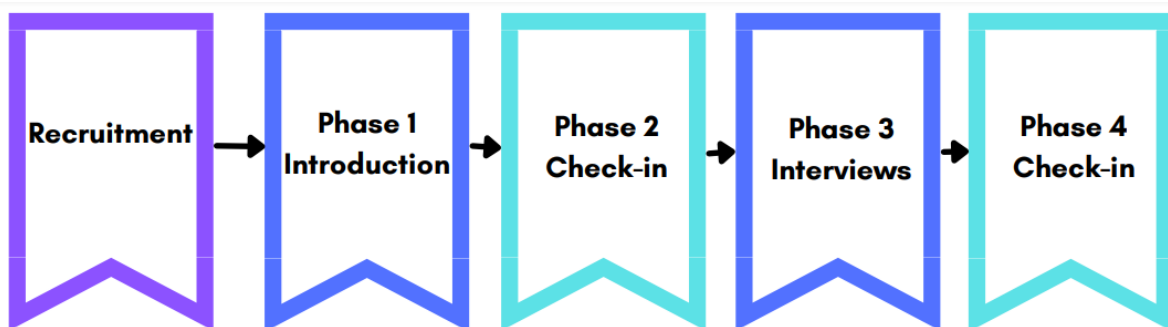
I am aware that by only recruiting from LGBTQ+ organisations, there is likely to be a high number of young adults who would have fit the participant criteria but have not accessed the research invite. All the participants had online or offline secure support networks, and I wonder if their access to support enabled them to participate in the research. Individuals without a secure support network or experiencing isolation may have struggled to access the research project.

4.2.4 Informed Consent

I implemented a phased approach to the narrative interviews to allow participants to ask questions and seek clarification about the research project (Image 1).

Image 1

Phased Approach



Before the introduction session, I provided the information sheet (Appendix D) and consent forms (Appendix E), and then during the introduction session, I went through the consent form and information sheet to ensure the research project and participation parameters were clear.

Whilst the introduction session was an important space to renegotiate consent and clarify research aims, I wanted to empower participants to have a sense of autonomy and control over the stories and information they chose to share with me. Furthermore, Gillian (2015) emphasises the importance of a relational approach between the researcher and participant within a narrative

inquiry, given the collaborative nature of the approach. Therefore, I felt it was essential to provide a space to build rapport with participants and provide further information about who I was and my interest in the research topic to attempt to stabilise the power imbalance, emphasising that I am not an 'expert' or seeking to find a particular 'truth' in the research (Hesse-Biber, 2007).

While I felt that verbal narrative interviews were the most appropriate approach for data collection, I was interested in using creative methods, mainly as I often use arts-based approaches to gather young people's views in my practice as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP). It was important to me to consider the narrative process as a dynamic approach (Daiute, 2014). Estelle and Forinash (2007) wrote about the positive impact of creative-based methods in narrative inquiry, particularly when exploring the views of individuals who occupy marginalised perspectives, describing how perspectives often lost in traditional methodologies can be better understood. I noticed the strong link to Personal Construct Psychology (Kelly, 1955), whereby the researcher may explore how a participant makes sense of their experiences, particularly when there may not be a shared understanding of the language used (Winter & Reed, 2016). Providing a space to consider the constructs participants may have discussed was a valuable addition to the research, and I wanted to reflect on how I could add in the concept effectively.

I chose to add an optional creative arts element into the introductory session with participants, which I completed alongside the participant to support rapport building. The activity presented was creating two paper t-shirts, one that presented your online identity and another that showed your identity offline, using collages and drawings. I felt the activity would provide a space to explore some of the language and constructs that may be important to participants but, importantly, would allow me to ask participants to consider what aspects of their online experience they would feel comfortable sharing with me during the interview. Aldridge (2016) emphasised the importance of promoting self-protection amongst participants to ensure that participants have had time and appropriate space to consider the stories they feel comfortable sharing and understand that their wellbeing is the priority throughout the research process.

I sought to renegotiate consent throughout the research, ensuring that participants had regular reminders of their right to withdraw from the research without any explanation needed. In addition, the phased approach in the research included check-ins after the introductory meeting and the verbal interview to ensure participants were still happy to participate and provide any signposting to support should they have required it.

4.2.5 Wellbeing

I experienced discomfort when positioning the research as ‘highly sensitive’ as outlined in the university research guidance. Particularly as I was actively seeking to find positive experiences in online communities, and all the participants would be adults. The research’s focus on sexual and gender identity, however, positioned the research as sensitive. I found the use of supervision helpful to unpick what the sensitive nature of the research was, rather than feeling I was perpetuating an idea that an individual’s identity was somehow risky or sensitive. It is important to acknowledge that existing literature highlights that young adults who are LGBTQ+ are likely to have faced difficult experiences online (Powell et al., 2020; Meechan-Roger et al., 2021). Additionally, the oppression the participants may have faced due to their identities (Bradlow et al., 2017) requires careful consideration of what support or approaches may support their involvement in the research whilst reducing any potential harm.

During the introductory meeting, I provided participants with information about available sources of support and introduced Kooth (2022), an online mental health support platform for young people aged 10-25, with specific support around LGBTQ+ issues. Kooth (2022) provides free access to trained counsellors, peer support and self-help resources; if participants wanted to sign up and access the support, they could.

To further safeguard participants, I provided all participants with a traffic light card; to indicate if they wished to stop the interview in a non-verbal manner. Additionally, I created a distress protocol to identify signs of distress and have a clear system in place for what I should do in these situations (Appendix F). For example, if a participant continuously cried or shook, the interview

would be stopped, and I would follow the protocol, adapted from Draucker et al's. (2009) distress protocol for research and informed by guidance from the LGBT Foundation (undated).

Time was allocated after all the interviews to debrief and check in with participants, where participants could ask any questions, and I could offer support. The debrief provided a valuable space to engage in light-hearted conversation and ensure participants felt comfortable continuing their day. In addition, I provided participants with a debrief contact sheet detailing relevant support services they may have wanted to contact (Appendix G).

4.3 Narrative Interviews

The narrative approach highlights the extensive breadth of how narratives may exist and can be shared; subsequently, there are varying approaches to narrative inquiry (Linde, 2001; Andrews et al., 2013). Hydén (2013) reiterates the importance of considering the approach to narrative inquiry when exploring sensitive topics, emphasising the importance of a relational approach. As previously stated, I collected spoken narratives through audio-recorded face-to-face interviews. Since my research was aimed at individuals aged 18-21, sharing their stories verbally with me was likely to be the most natural and comfortable method for participants. I felt that using verbal interviews allowed me to clarify meaning with participants and provided a method of understanding how young adults make sense of themselves and their experiences (Bruner, 2004). Two interviews took place in a private room of the LGBTQ+ group the participants attended at a time and date that worked best for them. One participant requested that the interview occur in a public space such as a café or pub. They were available on the weekend, so organisations they typically accessed were closed. The participant shared that they often did not feel safe or comfortable in new environments as a transgender individual and felt it was important that I knew they had diagnoses of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). I sought guidance from my supervisor, and through this discussion, I felt it was important to respect the participant's wishes and find a public space that they felt comfortable in but may have more private spaces to talk. We had a

private section of a café upstairs; I was initially apprehensive that the public nature of the space may have prevented the participant from speaking openly, but this was not the case.

The interview had an informal and unstructured approach to ensure that the control of the topics and stories discussed remained with the participants (Mischler, 1991). I adapted the interview structure and schedule because of the pilot study. I did not include structured questions eliciting responses around the negatives or positives of online communities, as the pilot participant strongly felt that it needed to be led by the participant. They were concerned that explicitly asking for the negatives may sound like I am critical of online communities. The pilot participant was keen to emphasise the positive nature of online communities, and it subsequently felt important to create a way to summarise these with participants effectively. Therefore, during the interviews, I made simple graphic visuals (symbols and pictures) as a way to ensure I did not spend extended time writing, but it enabled me to try and capture the key themes and areas to reflect and summarise, with focus on the benefits online communities had provided. All three participants asked me to keep the graphic notes and shared positive feedback of feeling it reflected the conversation and effectively captured the interview. The pilot participant also felt that the opening question should include how participants create online communities and how they experience them. Additionally, they felt the inclusion of how they created communities positioned the participant as active and having control rather than as an experience that is done to them. I thought this was an empowering view of the research topic and agreed that explaining the opening question before the interview and then reminding participants of it at the start could be helpful.

As I did not have any prior experience conducting narrative interviews, the pilot study was a useful space to practice prompts and follow-up questions. I found Hollway and Jefferson's (2005) sentiment regarding narrative interviewing valuable, which details the importance of enabling participants to tell their stories without interruption. Therefore, I tried not to impose my own meaning or ask specific questions; instead, I tried to seek clarification, summarise and echo key phrases and words back to the participant. Questions such as "How was that experience" and "How

did that feel” were used as follow-up questions. As well as more specific questions to seek clarification, such as “What do you mean when you say “I am different there”?”.

There were, however, times when my interest or meaning was evident within the interviews, and through reading the transcripts, my questions changed the direction and focus of the conversation, emphasising Riessman’s (2008) position that interviews are co-constructed.

4.4 Quality in Research

The measures to ascertain the quality of quantitative methodology are well-established; these often refer to generalisability, validity and reliability, usually concerning specific statistical testing (Fields, 2013). However, the measures utilised in quantitative methodologies are not considered appropriate quality measures within qualitative approaches (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Despite the often small-scale nature of qualitative research, as in the case of my research project, and the lack of structured statistical approaches, considering the quality of research remains an essential aspect of the project (Yardley, 2000). There is a range of differing principles and structures that researchers have used in qualitative methodologies. Throughout this section, I will refer to Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) quality principles frequently cited and used in research.

4.4.1 Trustworthiness and Creditability

My critical realist positioning impacts how objectivity and reliability are understood because I accept that knowledge is determined by an individual’s beliefs and experiences in the world (Bunge, 1993). Thereby the concept of objectivity and reliability will not be consistent and will differ for each individual. Therefore, Lincoln and Guba (1985) question what the principles of validity and reliability would translate to within a qualitative methodology position. Trustworthiness in this context refers to how reflective my analysis was of the participants’ experiences and ensuring the research process is in keeping with the research aims and objectives.

Therefore, the research’s trustworthiness is assessed and explored rather than reliability (Mishler, 1990). Due to the narrative approach used in the research, I felt that using a relational approach was an important aspect of trustworthiness. The introductory meeting between myself and the participant was important for building rapport and trust. I was aware of the collaborative

nature of the narrative interviews and therefore wanted to ensure that participants were given appropriate time and space to get to know me and feel comfortable sharing their stories with me (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I made a conscious decision to ensure that I disclosed my own identity to participants; the power dynamics between researchers and participants, particularly in research around sexual and gender identity is well documented (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2012; Ganga & Scott, 2006; Adams, 1999; Huckaby, 2011). Riley et al. (2003) discussed the influence mutual disclosure alongside reflexivity can have in alleviating the power imbalance present in research. Whilst I agree with the sentiments of Karnieli-Miller et al. (2009) that the power imbalance will be present regardless, I think the steps taken to attempt to rebalance and acknowledge it is imperative. Nelson's (2020) research explored the experiences of an LGBTQ+ researcher researching sex and gender and noted that the connections created had a substantial benefit alongside participants feeling more comfortable sharing their experiences.

Additionally, I implemented member checks at regular intervals during the research. As previously detailed, I summarised the narrative interviews through graphics, and once the interviews had ended, I shared these with the participants. Before I analysed the data, I offered to share the interview transcripts with all participants, the transcripts were written verbatim from the interviews, and I wanted the participants to have a chance to check these to ensure they were truthful if they wished (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). None of the participants wished to read their transcripts, stating they trusted they would accurately reflect the interviews. However, when I reached out to share the transcripts, one participant wished to share their story further. I was initially unsure if it was appropriate to use it in the analysis; however, it felt important to utilise the stories shared with me, and the discussions were areas not covered in the initial interview. Creswell and Miller (2000) call for narrative researchers to have repeated conversations to thicken the participants' narratives. Therefore, the inclusion of the additional interview I felt added to the rigour of the research.

4.4.2 Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability is the “stability of data over time” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p.242), and confirmability focuses on ensuring the interpretation and collected data are “not simply figments of the evaluator’s imagination” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p.243).

In keeping with the dependability and confirmability aims, I ensured that I was clear and upfront with participants about the stages of the research and regularly provided opportunities for participants to review. For example, I offered to send participants copies of the transcripts and utilised an analysis method that enabled member checks, which I will detail later in this section. Additionally, I utilised a research diary to consider my reflections and acknowledge reflexivity.

4.4.3 Transferability

Due to the nature of narrative inquiry, the data collected will not be generalisable, as the narratives shared will be specific to the experiences and individual participants in the research project. However, EPs have a clear role in developing anti-oppressive work and ameliorating oppression in their professional capacities (Sewell, 2016). Therefore, whilst I recognise that the research project is not generalisable, it can support resisting generalisations that are symbiotic with oppression (Stake, 1995).

The research process is described in detail throughout my thesis, with particular attention to my methodological and procedural decisions, which may be supportive in ascertaining the applicability of my research in alternative contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I aim for the narratives shared to inform professional practice and increase understanding of the experiences of online communities. Therefore, using a detailed methodological approach is likely to support this aim.

4.5 Transcription

I audio-recorded all the interviews on a dictaphone, which I then stored in a password-protected folder on the University of Sheffield’s approved secure platform. During the narrative interviews, I asked all participants to select a pseudonym for themselves and anyone discussed during the interview. I made all identifiable information, such as school names and specific locations,

anonymous. At the end of each interview, I made reflective notes as part of my reflective researcher diary (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013).

I transcribed all the audio recordings by hand on the computer, listening to the interviews repeatedly. I used different coloured fonts for participants and myself to ensure the transcript was clearly differentiated between the two voices. One of the participant's dialects is specific to the region in which they live; whilst I understood the language they used, it is unlikely to be familiar to individuals who do not reside or have previously resided in the area. In order to ensure the analysis and transcripts are accessible to the examiners and possible readers of the thesis, I added standard English definitions of the terms. Additionally, I added the definitions of common colloquiums that participants used, which are not region specific, but I felt it would support the flow and understanding of the transcripts (Appendices H, I, J).

I used conventions adapted from Jefferson (2004) and Riessman (2008) throughout the transcripts:

Table 2

Transcription Conventions

Symbol	Meaning
(.)	Pause of less than one second
(6)	Pause length in seconds
((sigh))	Non-verbal communication
[Overlapping speech
*	Identifiable information that has been anonymised e.g., *area or *Mr Taylor
(inaudible)	The speech is inaudible in the recording
[<i>standard England meaning: mate or friend</i>]	The standard English definition of a specific region or colloquial term used e.g., mush

4.6 Narrative Analysis: The 'Listening Guide'

The Listening Guide (Gilligan, 2015) is the method of analysis I have chosen for the research project. I felt that an approach that focused on the multiple voices present in a narrative and provided a method to attend to them was important. Woodcock (2016) has reflected on using The Listening Guide to listen to the voices of individuals marginalised or silenced in society. Therefore, I felt the Listening Guide was entirely suited to the research's emancipatory aims. In addition, I felt that the volume of research exploring the views of young adults who are LGBTQ+ focusing on the risks and dangers, further increased the importance of using an analysis technique that prioritised understanding the participants' voices (Koelsch, 2015).

There is a considerable focus in the analysis on exploring how the participants make sense of themselves and their experiences. Particularly through the use of 'I Poems', where the researcher can explore the different ways an individual speaks about themselves (Gilligan & Eddy, 2017).

Reflection: I was initially apprehensive that the use of The Listening Guide (Gilligan, 2015) was not an accessible form of analysis. I felt providing participants with a form of the analysis was an important step and I wanted to offer the I poems to the participants but was concerned that this was not accessible and perhaps would not feel reflective of the interview for them. However, through supervision I realised the Listening Guide was an appropriate fit and I needed to consider the best way to disseminate the findings to the participants and explain the I Poems if participants decided they would like to read them.

The Listening Guide emphasises the relational approach between the participants and researcher, ensuring the researcher's influence and role in the interviews and interpretation is acknowledged (Woodcock, 2016). The initial introductory meeting created rapport between myself and the participants, and I think this provided an essential element to ensure participants felt comfortable. However, one participant appeared to want the interview to be a reciprocal conversation, with discussions around mutual experiences, which I feel may have silenced other stories they would have otherwise shared in the research interview. As a result, my approach altered between the interviews; in some, I provided more questions and responses than in others, particularly as I became more confident with the narrative interviews. Woodcock (2016, p. 3) stated

that it is “important to remain aware of our own emotional reactions” as researchers, which I think the acknowledgement of is in keeping with the relational approach taken throughout the research.

Acknowledging the environmental context of the participants was consistently an important component in choosing an analysis approach. Brown & Gilligan (1992) reinforce the importance of considering the social and cultural environments a participant lives in, which further confirmed the appropriateness of the analysis technique for my research project.

The Listening Guide presents a “pathway into relationship rather than a fixed framework for interpretation” (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p.22). Whilst no fixed structure must be followed, multiple listenings of the interviews are essential, with the researcher then needing to make crucial decisions about how the framework is utilised (Gilligan et al., 2006; Gilligan & Eddy, 2017).

The Listening Guide details four stages that can be followed (Gilligan, 2015). Woodcock (2016) provides guidance on applying The Listening Guide to research. I utilised all four stages throughout the analysis of my interviews.

4.6.1 Stage One: Listening For The Plot (Woodcock, 2016)

Step one of the analysis is based upon the initial listening of the interviews, where the research focuses on the plot of the narrative to gain insight into the participants’ story. A fundamental aspect of the initial stage is creating a reflexive account (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998), which allowed me to explore the feelings and thoughts that arose when listening to the narratives shared. I felt this was an important starting point of the analysis to ensure that I did not use the participant’s narratives to express what I wanted in the research instead of reflecting on what they were sharing. I created a table to work through the analysis, with the transcription in one column and my analysis in the next (Appendix K). In the initial listening, I used a green highlighter to mark keywords or key phrases that I considered important such as repeated words, emotional responses or silences (Brown & Gilligan, 1992).

4.6.2 Stage Two: Constructing I Poems (Woodcock, 2016)

The second stage of the analysis is creating the I Poems, which involves reviewing the use of first-person pronouns to understand better how the participant makes sense of themselves (Gilligan et

al., 2003). I followed Gilligan and Eddy's (2017) guidance to create the I poems, highlighting in yellow every 'I phrase'; I then collected all the I phrases together, placing each on a different line.

4.6.3 Stage Three: Contrapuntal Voices (Woodcock, 2016)

The third stage of The Listening Guide is focused on listening for the different voices present across the narrative noting "the tensions, the harmonies and dissonances" (Gilligan, 2015, p. 72).

When listening to the narratives at this analysis stage, I highlighted each voice I heard in pink (Gilligan, 2015). Listening for the contrapuntal voices within the analysis conveys the complexity of the narrative and illustrates the tensions between the different voices and the possible contradictions and incoherence throughout the narrative (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013)

Before beginning the fourth stage, I created a contrapuntal voices document for each participant relating to the key areas I would explore in the written analysis. The document ensured I paid attention to the contrapuntal voices when I composed the analysis and highlighted the tensions and harmonies in the voices across the narratives (Appendix, L., & M., & N).

4.6.4 Stage Four: Composing an Analysis (Woodcock, 2016)

Stage four involves considering all the stages together and creating a written analysis. The final stage of the analysis does not have any specific guidance or direction in the guide and relies on the researcher using the different stages of the analysis to form a structure to discuss the narratives shared.

Tolman and Head (2021) present the Listening Guide as "fundamentally different from, and in some way antithetical to most other prominent qualitative approaches" (p. 153), because it is an approach that is focused on the psychological experience of participants as opposed to static categories. Cruz (2003) highlights that The Listening Guide places the participants' voices at the heart of the research, which was a fundamental aim of my research. Therefore, I felt it was important to incorporate all stages within the written analysis, capturing the non-traditional approach I had taken to the qualitative data. Tolman and Head (2021) further emphasise the need to include all stages in the written analysis; they highlight that unique psychological knowledge cannot be discovered without reflecting on the analysis in its entirety. Therefore, the findings chapter is a

synthesis of each participant's story, depicting the plot of their narrative, an exploration of how the participants may understand themselves through the I poems and a recognition of the polyphonic nature of narratives achieved by the focus I have placed on the contrapuntal voices I heard in the narratives.

Petrovic et al. (2015) highlight the reflexive approach required in the composition of The Listening Guide; whilst there are no set rules to the write-up, they outline the importance of becoming wholly immersed the listening process and reflecting this into the written account. I have tried to represent the immersive analysis through the inclusion of all aspects of The Listening Guide. My findings chapter followed a similar process to Watt (2007); through their ongoing reflections, they identified greater connections in the stories and key areas that stood out or were prominent in each narrative. From the key areas, I then attempted to provide some order and coherence to the messy and fragmented nature of the participant's stories, selecting six key quotes from each of the participants, which I then discussed in greater detail, identifying the tensions, harmonies and multiple voices present (Andrews, 2020).

Recognising the polyphonic nature of the narratives is central to narrative methodologies; Kim (2016) proposes that researchers of narrative inquiries need to enable participants to speak for themselves, avoiding a simplified presentation of one singular voice or point of view in the research. Bakhtin's 'theory of novelness' exemplifies the considerations I took to represent the participants' stories in the findings chapter. Bakhtin's theory suggests that allowing multiple voices to emerge ensures that no one voice is privileged, identifying that caution is needed when researchers seek to enforce unity and order in narratives as this may silence a participant's voice (Bakhtin, 1984).

Bakhtin (1981) highlighted that novel narratives are important when listening to individuals who traditionally do not have power or privilege. Therefore, I felt that acknowledging the narrative's complexity and polyphonic nature was an important step towards my emancipatory aim. Bakhtin's theory indicates that, "...one may begin the story at almost any moment and finish at almost any moment" (Bakhtain, 1981, p. 31). I have developed the analysis to represent the fragmented and

complex stories that were shared with me. Narrative smoothing is typical in narrative methodologies to make the participant's stories coherent and engaging for the reader. Spence (1986), however, argues that it can be problematic to strive for coherence and narratives can subsequently lose important context or misrepresent the complexity of the narrative. Therefore, whilst I tried to provide some level of coherence to the analysis and the written account, I drew upon all aspects of The Listening Guide to represent the fragmented nature of the narrative, particularly given that the stories shared were not in chronological order, with Alex, for example, requesting an additional interview where his story presented an opposing narrative of his experiences with online communities.

Representing the participant's voices was a key consideration in the composition of the analysis. Therefore, I decided to include the I poems I had created throughout the analysis. Koelsch (2016) discussed The Listening Guide's approach to attending to silenced voices, and paying attention to the multiplicity of a single voice. Koelsch (2016) explored the use of I poems to enable a reader to understand and care about the subjective experience of other people. The creation and thus the inclusion of the participant's I poems is an effective way to emotionally engage an audience, demonstrating how a participant may understand or consider themselves in their narrative without pathologising the tensions and contradictions of their experiences.

Recognising the multi-layered nature of the narratives, alongside fully immersing myself into listening to the narratives, was an essential aspect of recognising the worthwhileness and validity of the individual stories, which Dennis (2018) highlights, "...is the deepest form of validity" (p. 116). The approach I took to the analysis is indicative of some of the key concepts of quality in narrative methodology, as Andrews (2020) has explored. Andrews (2020) presented a range of quality indicators in narrative research, many of which are included in Lincoln and Guba's (1985) qualitative research quality principles, which I have previously discussed in this chapter. However, Andrews (2020), additionally includes the concepts of truthfulness, trustworthiness and multi-layered stories. Andrews's (2020) reference to truthfulness refers to the interactions between people; my approach

presents the fragmented nature of the narratives, which I think is supportive of this quality indicator, whereby I attempted to resist the social expectation to, "...make sense of it all" (Frosh, 2008, p. 38). I aimed to instil trust through my transparent approach to the analysis, including through the use of reflection boxes and referring to the steps of The Listening Guide. I centralised the voices of the participants through the inclusion of the narrative plots, the I poems, and the contrapuntal voices.

Reissman (2016) highlights that trustworthiness is strengthened with, "...evidence from informants' accounts" (p. 191). Throughout the analysis I have continued to evidence the participants' narratives. Andrews' (2020) inclusion of multi-layered stories particularly interested me, stating the essential role of narrative research is to explore the different levels of storytelling, acknowledging that stories and the understanding of stories always exist in relation to other stories. I think exploring how the participants discussed themselves in their narratives through the I poems and considering my personal reflections on the stories were fundamental components of reflecting on the multi-layered stories. I found it particularly interesting that Andrews (2020) additionally included scholarships and accessibility as a quality indicator, outlining the careful balance narrative researchers must adopt in displaying theoretical understanding whilst remaining accessible. Creating an accessible thesis for my participants has allowed me to engage in a deeper level of discussion around the specifics of the narrative methodology whilst remaining cautious not to become too focused on the approach.

I think it is also important to note Munro's (1998) caution towards narrative inquiry, suggesting that neglecting the inquiry component may allow researchers to, "...romanticise the individual and thus reify notions of a unitary subject/hero" (p. 12). My interest in the participant's experiences may have enabled me to romanticise the narratives in the way that Munro (1998) describes, perhaps providing a greater level of commentary or meaning than other researchers. However, to support me in striving towards quality research, I considered the inquiry element of the methodology at length, and to support the transparency and, therefore, the trustworthiness of the analysis, I have included all the components of the analysis approach throughout the findings

chapter. Clandinin and Murphy (2009) emphasise that narrative inquiry is relational; I have taken a relational approach throughout all aspects of the research process, and I have attempted to demonstrate the relational nature of the research throughout the findings chapter by acknowledging my voice and the relationships I made with my participants.

Chapter 5: Findings

5.1 Overview

In this chapter, I present the analysis findings from the three narratives. In keeping with the narrative approach I have used in the research project, I have presented and analysed each story separately, acknowledging the heterogenous nature of narratives (Hyden, 2013). Additionally, I have not utilised existing research alongside the narratives as I have tried to ensure the participants' stories are prioritised and remain central to the discussions, consistent with Poyser's (2020) previous research using the Listening Guide.

5.2 Static's Story

5.2.1 Narrative Introduction

Static is 20 years old, uses he/they pronouns, and identifies as transgender and Queer. Static shared that they would like an equal split of the use of he and they pronouns throughout this research project as he felt it would be an important space to raise awareness of gender differences and respecting pronouns. Static saw the research invitation through a LGBTQ+ youth pride group they attend. Static shared they often do not feel safe in unfamiliar or new spaces and requested the interview take place in a café, the LGBTQ+ group Static attends was not open the day of the interview. Static and I met in the upstairs of a café, a space separate from other customers or staff.

Static has diagnoses of ASD and ADHD. Static works in an office-based customer service role in the South East of England, in the same city he attended secondary school and college. Static begins by describing their close groups of friends at school and the positive impact of online communities during an eighteen month absence from education due to his mental health. Next, Static identifies the escapism and support they seek and give to others through online communities, alongside the challenges, particularly the physical distance from online friends. Static is now an active member of the LGBTQ+ community and considers himself a "*Queer parent*" (H 87) to younger members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Static chose the introductory meeting to occur one week before the research interview, which also took place in a café. Throughout Static's interview he uses Queer, LGBT and LGBTQ+ interchangeably, throughout the analysis I have modelled this language to capture Static's voice most accurately. Please see Appendix H for Static's full interview transcript.

Reflection: Towards the end of the interview, Static shared the following reflections: "We need to do more, more things like this for example it what's going to help and make things change" (H, 357-359) and "I think understanding this area and what it means to the Queer community is needed" (H, 363-364). Acknowledging Static's want for change and understanding for the Queer community, reminded me of the importance and value of listening to the voices of young adults who are LGBTQ+ to better understand their experiences. I wanted to understand Static's story and provide useful commentary and implications for practitioners to support his want for change, which I think has influenced my interpretation of the narrative.

5.2.2 "A couple of us actually came out before things were entirely (.) legal in the UK, so it wasn't something we would share around" (H, 8-9)

Static presented how others may have understood their gender and sexual identity and the impact they felt the wider socio-political context of governmental legislation had on the reaction to their coming out. Static appears to use UK laws to frame the timelines and context of their story, with the legislation (or lack of) seeming to embody the negative experiences he was experiencing at school from peers and particularly from school staff. A lack of agency or control is an evident voice that can be heard, with actions being done to Static, they position these experiences almost as consequences of the UK government not yet legalising same sex marriage.

I came out it was just before marriage became legal

I became target

I think

I probably could have chosen a better timing

I got

I didn't see a positive

I was pulled into a headteacher's office

I was brought into the head of years

(If) I was date to anyone

I would be put in isolation

I first came out

I took a year and half out

(H, 161-174)

I wanted to hold hands

I was like 12

(H, 177-178)

Reflection: There appears to be a heteropatriarchal focus, Static places explicit importance on the unity of marriage in the context of the legality of the LGBTQ+ community, which is an interesting reflection. I wonder what the absence of the ability to marry a partner told him, did it represent a message about the legal status of his identity perhaps?

My initial understanding of Static's reflection was around Section 28, perhaps indicating that the differences in understanding narratives is based upon individual experiences. This is likely to have impacted the way in which I understood Static's story.

Static experienced consequences and differential treatment from their peers *"I would be put in isolation because it was frowned upon to be doing any of that sort of thing"* (H, 171-172). There appears to be a sense of secrecy and shame that surrounds Static's identity at school with him further explaining *"my tutor at one point said it wasn't to be shown"*. (H, 168). Static's use of ambiguous language in describing what was frowned upon or not allowed further emphasises a voice of secrecy and shame that may have been propagated at school.

At school, Static was positioned as a *"danger to other students"* (H, 277-278) and resists the discriminatory understanding staff had of him *"it's cold outside I don't have a coat with me that was my main worry I wasn't looking around the changing room trying to catch a glance"* (H, 284-286). The level of mistrust and fear staff had for Static was further exemplified during P.E *"I used to have to get changed in the teachers' lounge in P.E because I was banned"* (H, 266-267). Despite no

indication that Static posed a risk or harm to fellow students, they were removed and placed in an inappropriate scenario as *“the teachers were still in there”* (H, 271).

Reflection: I acknowledge that my interpretation of Static’s experience is situated in the empathy I feel towards their story. The lack of consideration and safeguarding for Static within this context evokes a strong emotional response for me.

A pivotal moment in Static’s experience was turning to online spaces to access support. The support was particularly in response to incidents of physical bullying and homophobia from teaching staff, especially as they note that they *“couldn’t find any support online”* (H, 153) for the majority of the time they attended secondary school. However, when he did access online support Static indicates their online friends were *“an incredible support network throughout the years”* (H, 59-60). Static’s experiences have subsequently formed their beliefs on the suitability of teachers *“I genuinely don’t think they should be able to teach”* (H, 275-276). Static positions themselves as a *“Queer parent”* (H, 87) in online communities, I wonder if his negative experiences with and subsequent lack of trust for teaching staff has driven them to take on the role of protector for others in similar positions.

Static’s want for other members of the LGBTQ+ community to feel safe is embodied in his role of *“Queer parent”* (H, 87) and appears to call upon legislation to legitimise this *“it should be a basic human right”* (H, 324).

Reflection: My understanding is that safety is a basic human need stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 3. I am interested in Static’s hesitancy to state it as a human right, indicating that it ‘should’ be given. I wonder if Static’s previous experiences have felt inhumane and subsequently made them feel as though there needs to be legislation that explicitly includes the safety of members of the LGBTQ+ community. Or was the sentiment less about the specifics of the Human Rights declaration and more a comment on the fundamental need for everyone to feel safe and protected I wonder.

5.2.3 “For me personally it was very escapism” (H, 60-61)

Static speaks of the motivations for him to be present online, they identify that escapism was a fundamental source of support they sought online. Static’s presentation of escapism is conveyed as a skill they have “*learnt*” (H, 68) he describes it as a preferable coping strategy they use.

*I will go
(If) I’m upset
I can go okay
I want to sort this
I can go and hide
I learnt to escape
(H, 66-68)*

Static explains escapism through video games as an active event “*I’m not one to kind of sit around I will go and do things*” (H, 66) where gaming provides Static with “*people who knew my situation*” (H, 69). A voice of understanding and support stands out, particularly in contrast to the previous absence of support that Static experienced in school, with Static able to seek out the support he requires, “*yeah cool let’s play video games until 4 am*” (H, 69-70).

Reflection: I am struck by Static’s position as someone who is “not one to kind of sit around” (H, 66) this seems in contrast to common perceptions and understanding of gaming, that those who regularly engage in gaming are sitting around. I wonder if Static is challenging this viewpoint and is presenting gaming as an activity, one that requires active participation.

Static recognises the impact access to a supportive network and gaming has had “*so by having that space and network of escapism through that community and video games it has made things easier*” (H, 74-75).

Whilst Static recognises the positive attributes they have assigned to escapism through video games, they recognise the possible difficulties that may arise and the differences in support that others online may seek. Static highlights that for some “*they like to talk about things*” (H, 82-83), being able to provide others with support appears important to Static.

*I'm always happy to
I'll sit with you
I am close to
I will be there for people
I've done for quite a few years
(H, 83-86).*

As outlined above, Static views his role as a “*Queer parent*” (H, 87). The role seems to be an important aspect of Static’s identity and how they contribute to the LGBTQ+ community. Static further expands on this supportive role, describing himself as someone who is “*very very protective*” (H, 193) whilst acknowledging the danger that members of the LGBTQ+ community may face “*I can get very very scared for other people*” (H, 193) they state that they are “*very quick to be like standing in front of someone*” (H,194-195).

Reflection: Static’s characterisation of themselves appears indicative of the impact that both the environment and the systems that surround individuals can have. The impact then shapes whether LGBTQ+ students are able to feel safe and therefore able to access their learning. Static’s reflections on being vigilant for others appears to me to clearly embody the strong sense of belonging and community Static has found in their Queer identity and online spaces. I am left wondering about alternative ways for Static to have his need for protection and connection met. Static expresses a sense of duty and obligation to protect others, and I question what the emotional impact of this is on Static.

It appears that Statics reflects that their ability to support others both off and online is a result of the online support they received “*my experiences have made me a better person*” (H,195-196) “*that online space very quickly became my only space*” (H, 199).

Static describes difficulties that are specific to supporting others in an online context. There appears to be a potential clash between the support that is offered in online spaces and the type of support that an individual may be seeking, which can lead to further difficulties. “*I can misjudge and people may not (2) say*” (H, 91-92). Static, however, tries to be adaptable and present online gaming spaces as places that can provide adaptable support.

*I think
I can offer that
I need right now
(H, 93-94)*

However, Static additionally presents an experience of difficulty and stress when they do not have physical access to their online friends, “*it can be quite worrying and stressful*” (H, 96-97) in supporting friends online.

*I don't have access
I can't be there
I can't offer that
I can't give that
I myself might be too overwhelmed
I can't offer that
(H, 96-100)*

Static finds the “*physical distance*” (H, 107) the most challenging element of an online support network because he cannot “*go and provide the support and escapism or comfort*” (H, 107-108). Static appears to seek agency and control in the support they are providing, a desire to do and the absence of the control creates difficulty alongside emotional and logistical challenge.

Reflection: I wonder what providing escapism not in an online capacity would look like for Static? There appears to be an emotional weight in trying to be available to support others online that perhaps isn't as widely understood by those who don't actively engage in online spaces.

5.2.4 “Once they do get enough signatures the government do have to acknowledge them” (H, 136-137)

Static demonstrates strong views about the positive impact an online presence can have for the LGBTQ+ community, a voice of support can be clearly heard. Static expressed a desire to extend this support beyond online communities to wanting to fight for others in the LGBTQ+ community to

be appropriately supported. The power that the government is given appears strong in Static's narrative and holds a central role in the way in which he views his identity.

Static presents a level of expertise around support for the LGBTQ+ community and it appears an important part of their narrative. His understanding of the way in which support operates and the presence of support for others "*I always keep an eye out*" (H, 148), alongside wanting to be a source of knowledge for his younger brother and "*making sure he's got the resources that he needs*" (H, 131).

Static's commentary on governmental legislation does appear to go through a journey, with Static referring to their initial involvement in signing online petitions as evidence of their "*active*" (H, 138) role in the LGBTQ+ community. Static describes the changes in their level of participation within the LGBTQ+ community, whereby observing the support offered in college led to a lower level of active involvement. The voices of transition and belonging are powerful.

I was throughout school

I was

I was if

I was fairly active

(H, 139-140)

I seen more support

I had to look more outside

I always keep an eye out

(H, 146-148)

Static discusses more recent participation in activities offline such as "*going to marches*" (H, 135-136). Their physical presence at events appears to be an important aspect in their role of supporting "*Queer youth*" (H, 134). I wonder if the difficulties they faced, which created barriers in accessing support for them, particularly as they were off school for over a year, serve as a reason for active participation in the LGBTQ+ community both off and online.

5.2.5 *"If a kid was to identify as LGBT from a young age, oh no no, no you're too young to know"* (H, 293-294)

When discussing the differences between the attitudes to young people who identify as straight or LGBTQ+, there is a strong voice of hypocrisy and unfairness, *"but they're happy to tell the complete opposite to kids the whole time"* (H, 294-295). There is a strong sense of injustice that Static portrays across the experiences of *"Queer youth"* (H, 315) and the doubt and discrimination heterosexual adults place towards young members of the LGBTQ+ community. Static's use of directive language *"you'll be the man of the house"* (H, 293) suggests a lack of control in the perceptions others may hold towards Queer youth and the possible battle Static feels in resisting society's heteronormative goals to *"find a lovely wife"* (H, 292).

Static positions the hypocritical voice as a result of the hypersexualisation of Queer identities *"that is still a big thing of people sexualising LGBT people"* (H, 298-299). Static's narrative was taken in this direction after I asked, *"almost as though they were sexualising your identity?"* (H, 288) the topic had arisen during the introductory meeting and Static had mentioned he would like to discuss it during the interview, it is subsequently evident that the interview is a collaborative process and Static's narrative was shaped by the meaning and understanding I placed on their story.

Static experienced the hypersexualisation when growing up *"if you grow up as a girl and you're Queer, girls constantly get, oh do you fancy me?"* (H, 295-296). There is a sense that Static is emphasising a discomfort with a preoccupation others have on who he may romantically or sexually be interested in. A voice of unfairness can be heard throughout this discussion, with Static comparing their experience to that of their straight peers *"whereas no one goes to a straight cis women and suggests she is attracted to all cis men"* (H, 303-204). Static implies a sense of difference and separation from straight peers, and I wonder if this has supported his sense of belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. Perhaps the lack of understanding and hypersexualising of their identity has created a sense of discomfort amongst heterosexual adults and peers. Static describes a need for clarity in relationships with others through a voice of clarification and misunderstanding *"when your sexuality is known that people will assume you are telling them because you want to want to be with"*

them" (H,305-306). The difficulty that Static experienced in this need for clarity extends to the relationships they had with school staff.

I found that difficult

I never wanted

I was Queer

I would fancy them

(if) I spoke

I sadly

(H,306-312)

Static presents with certainty that the way in which their identity is misunderstood "*creates difficulty in being open with your identity*" (H,310). I wonder if this further creates difference and separation if Static feels they cannot consistently be open with their identity, implying a voice of secrecy. Static appears to connect the hypersexualisation of Queer identities and their want for members of the LGBTQ+ to "*feel safe*" (H, 315) together, suggesting the sexualisation they encounter evokes feelings of fear and an absence of safety. Static's ambition for others to feel safe is conveyed as tentative and perhaps hopeful rather than as something he considers to be a realistic goal for "*Queer youth*" (H, 315)

I wish

I think

I just wish

I think unfortunately

I really want

(H, 315-316)

The use of specific labels and terminology presents an additional barrier to people's understanding of Static's identity. Whilst the use of labels appears to be helpful in defining Static's identity, the knowledge others have when using a term that indicates "*you identify as something or someone that likes more than one gender*" (H, 298-299) appears to create misunderstanding and discrimination. Static highlights that it is considered these terms are synonymous with being "*greedy or (2) you want to have 'group times'*" (299-300). Static's narrative further conveys the motivation

for online spaces being safe places to access “support or information” (H, 361). “Queer people face a lot of discrimination and hate and as a marginalised group need to be able to turn somewhere” (H, 362-363). I wonder if the lack of understanding and the caution Static has experienced in being open with his identity exemplifies the reason he has sought comfort and companionship through creating communities online.

5.2.6 “I was diagnosed with both autism and ADHD, so my brain already works different” (H, 215-216)

The intersectionality of Static’s identity and the positions that they occupy appears to emphasise the difficulties that he faced from others who may exist outside of marginalised groups that Static identifies with. Static initially describes their brain as being different “from the norm” (H, 216-217) but amends it to “neurotypical brains do sorry” (H, 217). The amendment suggests a discomfort with the concept of normative. I wonder if Static often feels that he is placed outside of what society may deem to be the norm and therefore attempts to resist the categorisation of individuals as normative or not.

Reflection: I wonder if the process of the interview and retelling their story evoked an emotional response that may have impacted the way in which Static presented their narrative. Positioning himself as different from the norm may represent the way in which others have positioned them or recalling how it felt for them. Perhaps Static’s identity as an individual with an ASD and ADHD profile is important to him and therefore wants to resist against the normative understanding. I wonder if Static has experienced a lack of control in the way in which others have viewed and considered him and therefore the amendment is an important element of Static gaining agency in the way in which they share their story.

Reflection: I acknowledge that the way I am presenting Static’s narrative of resistance may reflect connection and empathy I felt in his narrative. I acknowledge that in my practice as a TEP I am cautious of the understanding of ‘norm’ and attempt to resist references to normative, which is likely to impact the way in which I understand Static’s story.

Static further explores the concept of normative and the impact his sociocultural environment had on his narrative and the way in which their identity has been perceived by others. “Whereas before my name was *Steve, which is very hyper-masculine” (H, 328-329).

I am masculine
I am a man
I'm not hyper-masculine
I received a lot of abuse
I work
I would receive daily transphobic hate
I thought a man
 (H, 329-334)

Static felt that selecting a name indicative of a masculine man created a distinct separation between how other people expected him to present and how he presented. Static explores this by explaining “*stereotypically the ideal of what a man or a masculine man could or would do*” (H, 331-332). Whilst Static reiterates his identity as “*a man*” (H, 330), it appears he creates a separation between himself and the ideal, perhaps framing himself as different from what may be deemed normative. I wonder if Static’s constructions of what an “*ideal*” (H, 331) man may look like are based upon the “*abuse*” (H, 333) he has received and if there is a societal assumption of what this ideal may look like, one that I have assumed that I have understood. The subsequent reaction was “*hate all because of my name*” (H, 334). I wonder if the image of an ideal male that society may present to Static conflicts with the image that society is presenting of him being a Queer trans person, and perhaps Static feels that the two images can not co-exist? Static shares the support of online communities, providing them with a space “*to be me, no questions on my name or my appearance*” (346-347).

I can be anyone
I want
I think
I want
 (H, 347-349)

Static experienced removal of control and presents a voice where agency is lacking due to assumptions that callers at work made about Static based upon his name. Clients were “*refusing to*

let me be on their companies account" (H, 335) or declaring that Static *"wasn't really a man"* (H, 337). Static presents a voice of difficulty when describing others questioning his identity in a work context. Despite contexts where *"work were really understanding and supportive"* (H, 337-338), Static experienced difficulty in accessing support from individuals that *"have good intentions"* but made inappropriate comments and questions. For instance, Static heard a manager asking, *"how does the sex work then and referenced my genitalia"* (H, 341). Static's experiences emphasise the possible danger and emotional impact of accessing support from individuals who may lack understanding. Static highlights the importance of his online friends in response to incidents of hate because *"having people that know me and understand the impact of those conversations and comments is supportive"* (H, 345-346).

Throughout Static's discussion of his identity, there appears to be a want for acknowledgement and understanding from the adults around them, particularly concerning the intersectionality of their experiences, which he described as *"all of that pile on top of each other"* (H, 217). The lack of understanding from adults offline evokes a voice of hardship and challenge; Static describes his online support as being *"very much my only source of really anything at the time"* (H, 209). Static emphasises the impact their online support had during a time when they received no support offline.

I wouldn't be here

I was diagnosed

I didn't have

I don't think

I would of made it

(H, 212-220)

Static's narrative is emotive and creates a powerful message around the impact online communities have provided them. Static caveats their sentiment with *"I am sorry if this a bit too depressing to say"* (H, 212) followed by explanatory gestures to indicate the potential coping strategies he employed during this period of hardship. I wonder if Static experienced emotional

difficulty in re-telling their story, and therefore the forewarning was Static's attempt to prepare both myself and him. It appears important to Static to emphasise the significance that online support provided to them "*it can be difficult to comprehend the extent to the impact the support had*" (H, 221), but verbally expanding upon the harm this period may have led to was too challenging. There was a shared sense of understanding through the explanatory gesture.

5.2.7 "They're the reason I am still here. Alive" (H, 234-235)

Static is directive and clear in the impact that their support online had for them, it is a clear moment in the interview that they do not use ambiguous language when referring to being alive, and I wonder if he wanted to be explicit in outlining the extent of the impact their community online had for him. Static states that "*my happiness overall massively spiked because of the people I was able to be around just online*" (H, 232-233). A voice of improvement and happiness can be heard throughout Static's discussion.

I was able

I think

I can

I went back to school

I am still here

(H, 233-234)

I am glad

I continued education

(H, 237-238)

Reflection: I feel that this captures Static's sense of hope and the value he places on the support and community that they've created online. I find this quote is a powerful example of the importance online spaces had had for Static.

5.3 Alex's Story

5.3.1 Narrative Introduction

Alex is 19 years old, uses he/him pronouns and identifies as a bisexual cisgender male. Alex attends an LGBTQ+ pride group at his college. Alex lives at home with his Mum and Dad in the South East of England.

Alex is currently attending a *"*sports course"* (1a, 369) at college and works part-time in a hospitality role. Alex describes their initial resistance to online spaces despite finding them a useful space to access support and information. Initially, Alex described enjoying school, but when peers became interested in female classmates, he struggled to come to terms with his sexual orientation and turned to online spaces for support. Alex's dad is of Asian heritage and follows the Islamic faith. Alex describes the tensions between perceived attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community and Islam.

Alex chose the introductory meeting to occur two days before the research interview, both of which took place at his college. Alex requested an additional interview to share his reflections about experiencing a sense of community and provide greater detail about the online spaces he engages with and the impact these have on him. Alex shared that he felt he had been *"harsh about gay people"* (1b, 10) and wanted to clarify his views. The additional interview took place three weeks after the initial research interview. Please see Appendix I for Alex's full interview transcript, Appendix 1a is Alex's first interview and 1b is his second interview.

5.3.2 *"I wanted to be normal I hated everything about (.) myself"* (1a, 35)

Alex describes the transition from when he had *"loved school"* (1a, 16) to feeling different from others because his football team *"were getting girlfriends"* (1a, 22). A voice of loss can be heard *"I actually miss that"* (1a, 21). Alex's discussion in identifying that he *"started to feel like to guys"* (1a, 34) presents a voice of hatred and shame.

I felt dirty and wrong

I wanted to be normal

I hated everything

I didn't know

I was feeling

*I knew
I couldn't feel like this
(1a, 34-37)*

Reflection: Alex's feeling of being "dirty" (1a, 37) due to his attraction to men has a strong emotional impact on me. I wonder if there were strong narratives present at this time, suggesting that people who don't identify as heterosexual are wrong and thereby dirty perhaps? I perceived this belief to be largely outdated and it reminds me of the importance of the environment and systems that an individual lives within, and how these form their understanding of the world.

I wonder if Alex's perception of 'normal' is synonymous with difference, and therefore attraction to a gender his friends have not expressed interest in feels outside of what may be considered normal. A voice that lacks agency and control can be heard through Alex's experience "*I knew I couldn't feel like this about other lads*" (1a, 36-37). Alex conveys a voice of jealousy through his description of identifying outside of the norm "*I was like jealous*" (1a, 38). I wonder if this voice of jealousy is predominantly through a sense of loss of his friendships to their relationships and interest in female peers or possibly a sense of jealousy that friends appeared to occupy identities that Alex considered to be positioned in the norm.

Alex attempts to resist the perception peers may have had about his identity and create a sense of control over how others may understand him. Alex remembers a female peer "*made a joke that I was gay because I didn't like any of the girls in our year*" (1a, 40-41). Alex attempts to defend his appearance as "normal" (1a, 35) and responds, "*you're all butters get me a fit bird*" (1a, 42). It strikes me as though Alex is attempting to situate his response in his understanding of how a typical heteronormative masculine defence may look.

Reflection: I have felt discomfort with the conflict between understanding Alex's attempts to have his need for connection and belonging met possibly through assimilation in a heteronormative environment and my perception of the interaction as reinforcing toxic masculinity through sexist remarks. I wonder how Alex reflects on this interaction now, having shared in the introductory meeting he cares about gender equality.

Alex conveys the potential power an LGBTQ+ role model may have had *“I guess er (.) role models I think it’s important”* (1a, 72). However, he describes the damaging impact the disclosure of a teacher’s sexual orientation had on both him and the teacher. A voice of discovery and connection can be heard when the teacher *“told everyone he was gay (2) like erm said is like married or something like that to a bloke (.)”* (1a, 44-45).

*I heard his fella is a *job*
(1a, 45)

I was like wait
I’m trying to think
I wouldn’t have known
(1a, 48-50)

Alex’s surprise at the teacher identifying as gay suggests a lack of representation or access to adults who may openly share their LGBTQ+ identity. Alex’s narrative in making sense of the teacher’s identity presents an interesting perspective of what he may have considered normative heterosexual and LGBTQ+ presentations. *“*Mr Taylor was decent, he was sporty and not a (2) sorry I’m trying to think like erm not of an offensive word. But was like, people liked him, he wasn’t like, like I wouldn’t have known he was gay (.)”* (1a, 48-50).

Alex explores his initial constructs of what being gay looks like *“camp men who’d wear pink and sing musicals and cry”* (1a, 53-54). I wonder if Alex’s limited exposure to others who openly identified as LGBTQ+ created specific connotations of being gay. The presentation of gay and sporty as contradictions is interesting, and I wonder if Alex initially felt the two characteristics could not co-exist. Despite the initial clarity the teacher’s disclosure had, Alex describes how Mr Taylor was subjected to homophobic slurs and abuse, with no intervention or support from the staff team.

Reflection: The lack of support and understanding from the staff team for Mr Taylor evokes a strong emotional response for me. I wonder what message this may have sent to students and other staff (alongside Mr Taylor) who did not identify as heterosexual; perhaps that homophobic abuse was tolerated. Could this have perpetuated Alex’s belief that he was *“dirty and wrong”* (1a, 35).

The abuse Mr Taylor received appeared to exacerbate Alex's feeling of shame; through his narrative, a voice of secrecy and a façade can be heard.

*I hate that word
I just knew
I needed everyone to know
I liked girls and girls only
I forgot
(1a, 58- 59)*

5.3.3 "I was living two different lives" (1a, 85)

Alex "*felt broken*" (1a, 79) after an online quiz said he was gay, and he subsequently began to remove himself from social situations "*I stopped going to practice and attending school as much*" (1a, 78-79). A voice that lacks understanding can be heard in Alex's offline life "*no one could understand*" (1a, 80) he, therefore, sought understanding and connection online "*I just started to go on like gay subreddits*" (1a, 82).

*I said like I'm gay
I thought like
I must be gay
I
I
I was living two different lives
I was gay
I never felt like me
I was just trying
(1a, 84-86)*

Alex experienced a disconnect between his life online and at school, despite being present in two spaces he "*felt like there wasn't a space for me, Alex, no one wanted me*" (1a, 92-93), demonstrating a voice of exclusion and rejection. I wonder if Alex felt he had to portray particular characteristics in these spaces, which contrasts with how he perceives himself, suggested through

the emphasis of using his own name and Alex describing that he *“had to be something I wasn’t”* (1a, 93).

The separation Alex experienced between his presence on and offline appears to be intensified by his view of online spaces as a *“guilty pleasure”* (1a, 104).

*I kept telling myself like delete it
I kept going
I just wanted somewhere
I could find out more
I am
I am quite all or nothing
I think
I was just like
I just began to feel safer
(1a, 104-107).*

Alex felt removed from others who were present online, reflecting that during this time, he thought *“only tragic people would have people that are (.) close or er important to them online”* (1b, 21-22). Despite Alex’s attempts to stop accessing support online, he experienced notable benefits from communities online *“I felt like I can be, be me, well more me(.)”* (1a, 109). Yet, Alex continued to experience a dichotomous view of his identity where he *“began to give me like more of actually me online”* (1a, 109-110), but then at school, Alex was *“hiding more and more of who I actually was”* (1a, 114).

*I actually was
I wasn’t lying online
I was
I could be me
(1a, 114-115)*

Alex’s *“online self and my real life it couldn’t at this time, they were two different people”* (1a, 118-119). Alex highlights awareness of the separation between his identities but presents the

distinction through a voice of sadness and one that lacks understanding and trust *“I look back and I just feel gutted, but there was just no one that I trusted”* (la, 119-120).

Alex’s need for connection and belonging is evident throughout his narrative, he makes ongoing attempts to fulfil the expectations others have of him on and offline *“everyone always wanted deep chats”* (la, 87), but often experienced a lack of interest in what others wanted him to do *“I’m not into like fashion”* (la, 91-92). Alex embodies the need for connection throughout the interview, through attempts to draw on shared experiences or understanding with me *“do you have anything you watch, you secretly love binging”* (la, 97-98). Alex explains that his attempts to build connection with others were because he *“just wanted to be wanted”* (la, 35).

5.3.4 *“it was just draining always being told off”* (la, 138)

A voice of policing and conflict can be heard in Alex’s experiences around the expectations of the online spaces he accessed, where he felt he had to *“prove”* (la, 123) himself to be included.

*I swear to you
I guessed their pronouns
I just thought
I’m trying to be friendly
(if) I’d got it wrong
I
I am not transphobic
(la, 130-133)*

There is a change from Alex identifying online groups as enabling him to feel *“safer”* (la, 107) to a recognition that *“some people angry so angry”* (la, 134-135) in the online groups. Alex felt others were quick to regulate and call out behaviour *“everyone getting lairy [standard English meaning: rude or mouthy]”* (la, 132) which subsequently led to a reduction in time Alex spent online *“I just wasn’t erm really on it as much”* (la, 139).

A voice of exasperation can be heard *“just draining always being told off so saying or doing the wrong thing or like I don’t know not thinking the same thing”* (la, 138-139). Alex depicts a strong

image that the community he accessed online required collective unity including in the thoughts and views members held.

Reflection: Throughout the interview, Alex presents candidness in his often clumsy choice of language *“can you say special needs? Don’t answer that”* (1a, 180-181) and I wonder if the weight of regulation online conflicted with Alex’s natural approach to interactions and language.

Despite the apparent policing online, Alex met a romantic partner through the online platform and initially felt very positive *“I started talking with *Ben and he was great, it was I think the first time where it felt like Alex and whoever I was being online like erm joined”* (1a, 145-146).

Reflection: Alex’s use of past tense and referring to himself in third person is interesting. I wonder if Alex is describing this experience as an onlooker, does this highlight a disconnect Alex was feeling from himself at this time? Perhaps he no longer feels like ‘Alex’ and using his name is representative of how he felt at the time.

Whilst Alex caveats the relationship with warning through a voice of caution and judgement *“I know. I know. I don’t want to be that person, who has an online relationship”* (1a, 148-149), he highlighted the relationship was also laden with expectations that he was not ready to meet. Alex’s partner Ben, *“wanted to tell people we’re together”* (1a, 165) with an emphasis on publicising the relationship online. Ben *“wanted to like put my name in his bio and tag me”* (1a, 165-166), perhaps indicating a repetition of Alex’s lack of perceived control online. Alex’s hesitancy to share their relationship led to negativity from others in the online groups. *“I wasn’t ready for. I was getting messages from people we both knew in like online groups to say that like I messing him around and just giving me shade. Fair.”* (1a, 170-172).

Alex’s experiences of managing relationships online appear to place the needs and expectations of the wider group as the priority. Perhaps, Alex perceived his feelings of not being ready as less legitimate or important than Ben’s desire to share the relationship, particularly as the wider group shared Ben’s expectations.

5.3.5 “the teacher just said ‘stop being a squinny’ [standard English meaning someone who moans or complains a lot]”. (Ia, 228-229)

A voice of hate and hardship can be clearly heard in Alex’s narrative. Explicit pictures Alex had shared with a partner were distributed to peers in school without Alex’s consent. Alex describes a conflict between a need and want for support being outweighed by the fear of others discovering he was “seeing a lad” (Ia, 209-210). Alex pre-empted a lack of understanding from adults “I would be in trouble like they’d just give the usual about online your future will be over trust no one” (Ia, 210-211).

*I had no one to tell
I knew what was coming
I er
I wanted to die
I think
I wish there was someone
I could of erm talked to
(Ia, 211-213)*

Reflection: Alex’s lack of trust and the absence of support presents an emotive and powerful example of the importance of empathy and understanding from professionals. I am reminded that online spaces play a significant role in the way young people explore and navigate relationships. There appears to be a considerable lack of understanding or knowledge of what it may mean for young people, and the detrimental impact a lack of trusted adults, had for Alex.

A voice of bargaining can be heard through Alex’s attempts to problem-solve the sharing of his explicit pictures “if I don’t care maybe they won’t it could be from a girl you know” (Ia, 219-220). The emotional impact resided in Alex’s sexual orientation becoming public knowledge, which quickly happened. Alex received homophobic abuse from peers and an absence of adult support. “One of the girls walked past and shouted nice knob you gayboy, Alex is a [homophobic slur]. That was the worst point of my life” (Ia, 223-224).

*I thought at this point
I wanted
I didn’t want anyone*

I could actually be a gay
I was trying
I was saying
I'd been angry
I'm just a squinny
I'd punch a window for fun
 (1a, 226-231)

I knew no one cared
I don't understand
 (1a, 233)

Alex's distress appeared to manifest physically "*I went into the yard and punched a window ((laughs)) dinlo [standard English meaning fool]*" (1a, 224-225). Despite attempts to initiate support from staff, Alex was told to "stop being a squinny" (1a, 228). The lack of available help led Alex to access connection and support online.

I wanted to hide
I wasn't ready
I was gay
I just
I started like gaming
I didn't really sleep
I was not looking after myself
I'd game
I'd talk to
I'd just shit talk
I actually
I relied on these people
I think
I erm
I could be me
I didn't care
I could be me
 (1a, 239-246)

5.3.6 “My dad is my hero (.) but he hates er gay people” (1a, 35-36)

Alex depicts his dad with admiration yet wishes that he “*could be who my dad wants me to be*” (1a, 28-29). Alex describes a discrepancy between who he is and his dad’s hoped for version of him.

I always wished

I could be who my dad wants me to be

I have disappointed him

I said like my dad can’t know

Alex experienced a lack of understanding and acceptance from his dad, suggesting if his sexual orientation became known then his dad would have “*wanted to kill me*” (1a, 367). The very emotive statement presents a significant escalation and highlights the danger and risk Alex perceived he faced.

Reflection: A strikingly important implication for practitioners, to consider the safety and acceptance amongst parents/carers and guardians of young people who are LGBTQ+. The importance of considering the wider systems and possible belief systems in order to appropriately support and safeguard everyone.

A voice that lacks control or agency can be heard within the responses and interactions Alex had with adults “*the teachers didn’t even tell me or like ask me*” (1a, 364). The lack of control Alex experienced subsequently limited his access to information and in-person support, which appeared to strengthen his want for role models, particularly that represented his cultural background “*was never like teachers in school, as in Muslim teachers that ever spoke about anything to do with being gay*” (1b, 49-50). Alex’s dad’s “*views are strong*” (1a, 354), and he suggests that “*being gay isn’t allowed in Islam and my dad is from *Country*” (1b, 78-79). The words “*isn’t allowed*” (1a, 79) suggest that Alex has little agency over his dad’s view of the LGBTQ+ community, which impacts the way he views himself “*like am I haram. I had (.) well have so much shame*” (1b, 82-83). Alex demonstrates a continued sense that they perhaps consider their sexuality wrong or forbidden in their community.

Reflection: The use of the haram is interesting, I wonder if Alex wanted to emphasize the power Islam has on his sense of self and the way in which he understands and views his identity, and membership to communities.

A voice of caution and curiosity can be heard whilst Alex discusses his dad's Islamic faith and his membership in the LGBTQ+ community "*maybe it isn't a choice between like my dad and being gay*" (Ib, 139-140). Alex recalls an incident where a man in the local community "*was seen kissing another man and everyone was saying it was the evil jinn and he had to go to the Iman and get it out of him*" (Ib, 55-56). A voice that lacks control can be heard "*the evil inside of him was making him do that*" (Ib, 57).

Reflection: The event feels like an emotive occasion and memory for Alex. Aside from the religious aspect of the context particularly as Alex states he is not Muslim, I wonder how it feels for Alex reflecting on the assumption that two men kissing would be indicative of being possessed.

Alex is cautious in his narratives of the Islamic community "*I don't know if people actually believe it*" and presents an attempt to control a perception that may present the Islamic community negatively. A voice of tension can be heard in the narrative. Alex's difficulty in sharing his sexuality with his dad led him to find specific online groups and support "*they call themselves Queer Muslim content creators*" (Ib, 92-93). Alex's perception and openness to online communities appear to shift in the second interview, where evident voices of belonging and acceptance are heard, "*you are like erm part of that like group and space and there are in jokes*" (Ib, 96-97).

I felt

I was the only person

I wasn't

(Ib, 90-91)

5.3.7 “There was a place for me” (Ib, 118-119)

A recurring story throughout Alex’s narrative is based on his desire to belong and seek acceptance from others, he initially positions himself as being “*in the margins no one wants me in their club*” (Ia, 337). The intersectionality of Alex’s identity appeared to create specific barriers to creating a sense of community on and offline, as a cisgender, bisexual, British-Asian, working-class man, these are characteristics Alex shared during the introductory meeting that he felt were pertinent to his identity.

I didn’t count

I don’t belong

I’m dating a guy

I don’t in Queer spaces

(where do) I belong

(Ia, 321-322)

I’m not straight

I can’t always relate

I’m not erm accepted in Queer spaces

I think

I really did

I really did turn to like online

I prefer

I like actual real life

I just wanted to not feel alone

(Ia, 338, 341)

Through discovering a secure sense of community, Alex’s hesitation and guilt towards accessing online spaces slightly dissipates “*like it’s not actually that lame like it’s a proper like proper like important it’s everything*” (Ib, 158). A voice of understanding and acceptance can be heard “*having people that will understand or try to understand how you’re feeling that you don’t have to explain everything to because they get it or people who won’t be judgemental*”. (Ib, 159-161).

Alex's engagement in online groups incorporated social media platforms that he had initially not used to seek support "*I actually found people most on like Instagram you know or like erm TikTok*" (Ib, 91-92). Alex began to create a sense of community in different forms that did not require ongoing engagement on blogs and forums, "*just being able to like watch their videos and like being part of their like, group in a way*" (Ib, 93-94). Alex's consideration of what constituted a community shifted when finding a secure group of support "*that is that community on these particular creators like accounts for me*" (Ib, 99, 100).

*I am actually proper close to people
I've just like found
I think
I erm follow on TikTok
I have found people
(Ib, 103-108)*

A voice of belonging and acceptance is consistent in the second interview "*there was a place for me*" (Ib, 118-119) which draws considerable contrast to the substantial lack of support or understanding present in the initial interview. Alex's family network led to a distinct voice of heartbreak and sadness "*Mum says to me like I love you but I am so glad it was a phase with the boys. I felt ((sigh)). I felt like my heart broke*" (Ia, 356-357). The coordinating conjunction "*but*" (Ia, 356) seemingly implies the love is conditional to Alex's interest in men being a "*phase*" (Ia, 356), whereas now Alex has a space to seek "*support and just like erm comfort*" (Ia, 111) creating a network of "*good support or like information like I'm talking even like practical stuff*" (Ia, 123-124).

Reflection: I am struck by the limits placed on the love Alex's mum expressed, this reminds of unconditional positive regard and the positive impact this may have had for Alex and the way he viewed himself. I wonder how this statement impacted the way Alex viewed himself.

5.4 Glaze's Story

5.4.1 Narrative Introduction

Glaze is 20 years old, uses he/they pronouns and identifies as transmasculine and bisexual. Glaze typically prefers he/him pronouns but is also comfortable and happy with the use of they/them. For the purpose of this research, Glaze has requested an even split of he/they pronouns. I met Glaze at an LGBTQ+ youth and pride group in their local area. Glaze chose the introductory meeting to occur one week before the research interview.

Glaze works in an office-based customer service role in the South East of England. Glaze described the clarity he gained in labelling his identity from online spaces but illustrated the fear mongering and transphobia that is rife online and the subsequent need for them to limit their engagement on particular platforms. Glaze identified the challenges of members in online spaces often "*policing other people's identities*" (J, 156), yet also depicted the sense of community he has created online. Glaze is committed to not situating himself in an echo chamber and seeks new information online. Please see Appendix J for Glaze's full interview transcript.

5.4.2 "*Oh, so there's a word bisexual' and I was like 'Oh, that makes sense'*" (J, 7-8)

There is a strong voice of discovery and authenticity in Glaze's story of online spaces providing "*the words to describe myself and my identity*" (J, 4).

*I knew gay and straight
I was in sort of secondary school
I sort of started sort of exploring
(J, 5-7)*

Glaze describes finding appropriate labels for their identity from their online research "*I was like, oh, no, that sounds like me*" (J, 9). Despite this discovery, Glaze highlights the ability to change and alter the labels they use "*I've sort of gone through so many*" (J, 10) and outlines their ability to reflect and reconsider "*as I got older, I think maybe I don't actually identify with that so much as more*" (J, 11-12). A voice of comfort and understanding can be heard in Glaze's identity.

I found

I've just kind of just like settled

I am

I've been

I was able to explore that online

(J, 13-14)

Reflection: Despite the sense of empowerment Glaze appears to gain from the use of label, he doesn't view these as static or fixed which I think is an interesting point. It appears as though Glaze is embodying the caution in essentialist categories.

Glaze suggests the ability to explore their identity was unique to online spaces "*I-I-I don't think I could do that so much sort like in real life*" (J, 14-15). I wonder if the comfort of anonymity enabled Glaze the freedom to explore what felt more appropriate for him "*you don't really have like a face attached to anything*" (J,16-17). Glaze presents a voice of control and perhaps self-protection "*I wasn't going to be outed by a Tumblr blog*" (J, 18-19), perhaps Glaze was provided with empowerment in their ability to separate their "*real life*" (J, 18) and on Tumblr.

Reflection: I wonder if there was a clash between Glaze's perception of their online and offline life therefore describing their offline life as "*real*" (J, 18). Perhaps the experience of freely exploring their identity felt different from their experiences of presenting their identity offline?

A voice of meekness can be heard in Glaze's narrative, at school, Glaze attempted to "*draw as little attention to myself*" (J, 24).

I'm very much

I'm quite meek

I've just kind of kept my head down

(J, 22-23)

Glaze experienced a conflict between his want to be open and aware of their identity and not wanting to draw attention to themselves, describing when he came out as "*bi*" (J, 25) as "*very weird, all the attention was on me*" (J, 25-26). I wonder if online methods of seeking support and

information felt further removed from Glaze's presence offline and therefore diluted the attention they may have received.

5.4.3 "Then he sent me like, (.) porn accounts and stuff" (J, 48-49)

*I wasn't even really friends
I was at a time
I was friends with his girlfriend
I came out as bi
I wasn't out to everyone
I thought
I could trust
I didn't want to see that-t
(J, 46-50)*

A voice that lacks control is present in the narrative, in response to Glaze sharing that they are bisexual, a friend sent them unsolicited "porn accounts" (J, 49), demonstrating a betrayal of Glaze's trust in sharing this information with them "I thought I could actually trust them with that" (J, 48).

Reflection: I think it is imperative that young people who are LGBTQ+ are not situated in a risk discourse or that their vulnerability is assumed. I am however, reminded of the power those supporting and around individuals who are LGBTQ+ can often possess when they are privy to information the young person may not be ready or wanting to share more widely, this includes the adults around a young person.

Glaze experienced others making assumptions about his identity "oh but you're bi so you'd like it" (J, 68). In sharing explicit content with Glaze, the friend removed his control "my whole identity was being considered solely on what er (2) on sexual interests" (J, 72-73). Glaze emphasises their position on not wanting to engage with the content. I wonder if they wished to exert some control in how I made sense of this story, particularly as the event removed their control.

*I
I er did not want to see*

I didn't want to engage

(J, 72)

Despite Glaze explaining this interaction as “*the hypersexualisation of Queer identities*” (J, 66) and presenting a voice of violation “*very, yeah, very violated*” (J, 70) they did not feel able to seek support from teaching staff despite wanting “*the adults in my life to support and accept me*” (J, 61).

I never felt

I could like go to a teacher

I didn't feel

I'd ever get that support

(J, 51-52)

I guess it

I went to the same school

I knew his experience

I was like

I don't feel

I could go to them

I can see that

I know what he went through

I was like just feel safer

(J, 54-57)

Voices of self-protection and isolation can be strongly heard throughout Glaze's story, they attempt to grapple with a want for support and safety and appear to feel that the two cannot co-exist in offline spaces. “*It's bad coming from a peer, but like I was it would feel worse if it was coming from an adult*” (J, 59-60) Glaze felt that through disclosing an incident to staff they “*could experience that er that harm*” (J, 62). In their attempts to assess the risk, Glaze “*tried to deal with it alone*” (J, 60-61).

Reflection: I feel that Glaze was let down by educational professionals, from their fear to seek support or disclose their experiences. Everyone has a fundamental need to feel safe and protected and I wonder what impact this may have had for Glaze not experiencing this sense of safety in school. I wonder what could have felt supportive for Glaze to know that staff would not pose a risk of harm to him.

5.4.4 “It’s almost almost policing other people’s identities” (J, 156)

A recurrent story in Glaze’s narrative is the concept of policing “*this sort of idea you have to sort of tick every box in a checklist*” (J, 165-166). Glaze outlines that without “*online communities*” (J, 144-145) that they “*don’t think I’d feel as confident and secure in my own identity*” (J, 145-146). However, he feels that online culture, particularly in “*the past five years*” (J, 170), has become saturated with “*policing other people’s identities*” (J, 156).

A voice of restriction is evident throughout Glaze’s description of policing “*you have to experience this exact thing*” (J, 158-159). The “*have*” (J, 158) suggests a lack of control or agency that group members may experience about the terminology they can use to describe their identities and experiences. Glaze presents some resistance to the policing through their challenge of expectations others have of him as a transmasculine individual. “*if you’re a trans guy then why would you still like to wear a skirt?*” And I’m like “*because skirts are pretty*” like no one would question my gender, if I was a cis man wearing skirt, it would just be because skirts are cool” (J, 160-163).

Reflection: Glaze’s response appears to reflect the confidence they described in their identity, and perhaps a rebellion against societal expectations and policing that online groups have attempted to force upon him. It seems as though Glaze feels empowered that his opinions and choices are valid, he has a right to feel that skirts are pretty for example.

I think it is a really interesting reflection, that Glaze feels a cisgender male’s gender would not be questioned if they wore a skirt. I wonder if this reflection is shared by cis men, that they would feel readily accepted if they chose to wear a skirt?

I asked Glaze if the online policing had begun recently, possibly influencing the direction of his narrative. I wonder if without this specific question, they would have explored the role of policing identities in greater depth. My question highlights the co-productive element of narrative interviews. Glaze discusses the role of “*buzzwords*” (J, 171) as appearing to perpetuate the policing culture online “*they’ll just sort of learn, oh, this is problematic*” (J, 172-173), appearing to “*throw into a conversation*” (J, 172) without the understanding or correct context. I wonder if specific language

and key terminology have a significant role in the feeling of belonging and membership in online groups, thereby the overuse by some members is through a want to belong. Subsequently, Glaze thinks *“the internet has sometimes lost its nuance”* (J, 174-175).

A voice of resistance is present through Glaze’s description of *“reclaiming the word Queer”* (J, 176). An initial voice of understanding can be heard *“some people are really against that, which I understand”* (J, 176-177), but he resists individuals preventing others from using the word Queer *“you can’t stop other people from using that”* (J, 179-180).

Reflection: The evolution of language and the empowerment of the LGBTQ+ community appears important to Glaze. It’s interesting that they acknowledge the difficulty some people may face with the term *“if you have been insulted”* (J, 177) but struggles with the lack of choice or autonomy that those affected may try to instil. I wonder if this is an example of a debate that has nuances that are difficult to convey in a virtual space?

5.4.5 “I am offending people by just existing” (J, 205-206)

Glaze experienced a shift in the acceptance and understanding they initially found through online platforms. A voice of fear and difficulty can be heard in Glaze’s narrative of this change *“it is scary and it is difficult to be myself often”* (J, 207). Glaze recognises there has been *“a surge and a greater presence of TERFs and conversations well er hate and discrimination towards the trans community online in spaces”* (J, 208-210).

Reflection: Glaze is referring to trans-exclusionary radical feminist groups, my understanding of the term is that many women who may be identified as TERFs reject the label and identify as gender critical feminists. Carrera-Fernandez & DePalma (2020) share Glaze’s understanding of TERFs as women who reject the authenticity of the trans community, believing transwomen are removed from the female experiences of oppression and transmen are betraying fellow women. During the introductory meeting Glaze explained TERFs believe the trans community are stealing the identities of women and lesbians.

I could explore my identity

I do

I think it very much it varies

*I've gotten rid
I think
I got rid
I was
I think especially Twitter
I see TERFs sort of everywhere
(J. 210-215)*

Glaze describes the relentlessness of online discrimination, where a voice of sadness can be heard *"it's very saddening to me"* (J, 200). Glaze describes the power those who are *"creating this sense of fear"* (J, 190) and *"hate"* (J, 209) have in society, despite the distorted perception they present about the trans community *"they often try to say about men trying to invade women's to invade women's spaces. When it's not, it's that they are trans women, they are women"* (J, 188-190). Glaze has experienced discrimination offline, for example, when trying to use the toilet *"trans women aren't going into women's bathroom to try and assault anyone that they just need to pee."* (J, 191- 192) *"vice versa for trans men like it's just we just (.) we just want to pee"* (J, 193-194).

Glaze highlights that the discrimination and language used by those positioned as anti-trans has *"spread"* (J, 201) to an extent where their views are impacting government legalisation *"there is now being put into laws and bills affecting people's lives"* (J, 201-202). A voice of fear is strong throughout Glaze's story *"it is a scary, it's a scary thing to witness"* (J, 202).

Reflection: I wonder if the inclusion of transphobic language and debate in parliament feels as though the voices of the LGBTQ+ community, particularly the trans community (and those in marginalised bodies) are being silenced by people in power through the Bills? I wonder what Bills Glaze is referring to. Legalisation and laws appear to be important in legitimising his identity.

Glaze is concerned about the implications of legalisation passing in government, feeling it could perhaps *"limit us further"* (J, 204). Glaze's use of the pronoun *"us"* (J, 204) suggests a collective identity and a possible sense of community Glaze experiences as a member of the LGBTQ+

community. I wonder if it often feels as though it is the LGBTQ+ community versus those in power, for instance, the government.

Glaze experienced a *“sense of loss”* (J, 247) in his exposure to TERFs and online transphobia because of their understanding of J.K. Rowling’s connection to it *“I don’t want to see any of it anymore”* (J, 253). Glaze describes Harry Potter as *“a part of my identity”* (J, 250-251), their engagement and love of the books created a bond with their Mum and he viewed it as a *“constant source of support for me when I was growing up, particularly through dark times it was my comfort”* (J, 237-238). A voice of safety can be heard in Glaze’s recollection of the importance the books had for them *“it is just a book yeah, but it-it was a real erm it allowed me to feel safe”* (J, 238-239). Glaze shares an emotive sentiment about the books through his pre-emptive understanding that to outsiders, it may be considered *“just a book”* (J, 238). The ability to feel safe appears important to Glaze. Glaze’s exploration of the book presents almost a juxtaposition in that being different created a sense of belonging *“everyone there is different”* (J, 24) *“but there is a place for everyone”* (J, 240-241) which allowed him to *“consider those differences as strengths and that I had value”* (J, 241-242).

Reflection: A very powerful and honest reflection from Glaze, the empowerment that he received from the representation of difference and the ability to see that he had value and strengths evokes an emotional response in me.

A voice of loss and discomfort can be heard in Glaze’s anguish in separating himself from J.K. Rowling and, therefore Harry Potter *“I don’t feel comfortable associating with it anymore”* (J, 249-250). It appears Glaze wanted to remove their connection to Harry Potter from their identity. I wonder if through the loss the sense of safety and comfort that he received from the books was also lost.

5.4.6 “I’m able to curate again again that community for myself” (J, 260)

Glaze addresses the hate he has witnessed online through a need to limit his engagement with certain online platforms as a means to self-protect.

I was just seeing so much t-transphobia online

I couldn’t get away

I was just like

I’m just gonna get rid

I’m still active

I find it a lot easier

I can block

I can blacklist certain words

(J, 221-225)

I’ve stuck to it

I can just like

I have

I have

I’m not in the mood

I don’t have to

I’ve stopped

I found

I can still curate my own

I guess my own internet experience

I’m still able to create my own space for myself

(J,229-233)

A voice of autonomy can be heard through the control Glaze is able to create for himself across their engagement in online spaces and his ability to “*block things out block certain tags*” (J, 225). Glaze is selective in the platforms he now engages in, as a means to control his exposure to online hate, Glaze only engages in one social media platform, “*Tumblr*” (J, 224). Glaze had to take an active role in safeguarding himself online, it appeared the community and connections he had created online were important to him and, therefore essential that he was able to safely engage in

online spaces *“without my space and group that I have created online, I think without that I don’t think I just probably would be staying clear of the internet altogether”* (J, 257-259).

Despite limiting their exposure to specific content and areas of discussion, Glaze has *“tried to make sure that I’m not putting myself in an echo chamber”* (J, 268).

*I see like
I see like a term
I don’t recognise
I will try
(J, 269)*

Glaze places value in forming his own opinion and thoughts, the empowerment and community he accesses online do not appear to come at the cost of him sharing his views and voice, as when unfamiliar terms or concepts are shared, Glaze will *“take the time to look through what people have said about it their own experiences and evaluate for myself what I think is still still very important for me”* (J, 270-271).

Reflection: I wonder if Glaze recognises potential dangers in an over-reliance of online communities. Glaze’s sense of control appears strong in his ability to manage what his online space may include but also his attempts to engage in wider critical thinking. It appears empowering that Glaze’s voice is not lost or diluted through his membership in online groups.

5.4.7 “This is where I feel safe” (J, 327)

A voice of acceptance can be heard in Glaze’s story *“there are people who will accept me”* (J, 333). Glaze experienced resistance from his Mum as she was *“very against me talking to people online”* (J, 329-330). Glaze displays understanding *“from a safety standpoint”* (J, 330) but describes that given his awareness of online safety, his need for acceptance and support was far greater, especially as he was not *“getting that anywhere else”* (J, 333).

*I
I this was the only space
I did feel safe*

I do understand
I was
I got older
I was like
I am old enough
I'm not going
I
I understand
I was just like
I'm not getting that anywhere
I
I need to get it somewhere
 (J, 329-334)

A voice of connection is present in Glaze's story of wanting greater understanding and acknowledgement at school, especially in Glaze's desire for greater use of LGBTQ+ terminology "*If I'd of knew it was an option, I'd of seen it and thought 'Oh that's me' like-like I'm not weird or broken*" (J, 351-352), "*there are people like me*" (J,353).

Glaze thought it "*could've helped if college had understood that online community*" (J, 337-338) and the important role it played for Glaze, particularly when he experienced times of difficulty and his "*attendance got patchy for many different reasons*" (J, 339). Glaze described that the sense of safety gained online was supported by "*that sense of knowing I wasn't alone*" (J, 345-346).

Reflection: Perhaps an interesting reflection point for professionals, the acknowledgement of the support and understanding online spaces can have for young people. I wonder if this could enable more supportive and helpful conversations about online safety if young people feel that adults understand the importance online communities have for them?

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Overview

Throughout this thesis, I have explored the experiences of young adults who are LGBTQ+ in online communities, focusing on the period they attended an educational setting. I have addressed my research question in this chapter, utilising relevant literature. Reflecting on the participants' experiences, I have considered how educational practitioners and EPs can develop professional practice. Additionally, I have outlined my reflections on systemic change, recommendations for potential future research as well as the limitations of this thesis. Finally, I have addressed the hope that can be found from the research project and moving forward in supporting LGBTQ+ CYP.

6.2 Ecological Systems Focus

An important focus of my research was centring the participants' narratives to ensure that I captured their individual experiences, as discussed in the analysis. However, identifying implications for professional practice was imperative, which I felt was aided by outlining commonalities and recurrent themes across all the participants' narratives. The theme headings have emerged from the analysis, as I was influenced by the contrapuntal voices that were strong and consistent throughout the common themes. I wanted to reflect the multifaceted nature of the themes, so I have utilised subheadings to reflect the themes' complexities and to support the reader. My aim in identifying themes is not to suggest that the findings can be generalised in different contexts or across all young adults who are LGBTQ+. Instead, I aim to identify the possible steps that educational practitioners can take to more effectively support students who are LGBTQ+ or who may identify outside of a heteronormative focus.

To consider each participant's narrative individually, I have reflected on the impact of the environments surrounding each participant, which aligns with my research's theoretical and systemic orientation. I have utilised Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system theory, which presents a young person in the centre of multiple levels of an ecosystem. The theory identifies the direct and indirect impact different environments and systems have on a young person's

development and view of the world, from school and family setups to cultural values and legislation. The microsystem layer presents the environments in which the young person regularly interacts. Given my focus on the digital spaces each participant accessed, I incorporated Renn and Arnold's (2003) additions of digital spaces to the ecological systems model. I also considered Boyd's (2014) suggestion that each social media platform can be considered as an additional microsystem, which presents the opportunity for users to portray alternative expressions of self and connections with others. Boyd (2014) also considers the societal attitudes towards digital platforms at a macrosystemic level.

Identifying the environments and systems that may impact the participants can help draw attention to the implications of both the environments young people live in and that professionals work within, as conveyed in Scaife's (2019) paraphrasing of Vygotsky (1962): "if someone is taught to operate within a system without coming to understand that it is one among other possible ones, then [they have] not mastered the system but [are] bound by it" (Scaife, 2019, p. 110).

I, therefore, considered each participant's story in relation to Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1995) individually, combining Renn and Arnold's (2004) additions of online spaces into the ecological systems theory, depicted in the highlighted elements on each of the images below.

Image 2

Static's Ecological Systems Diagram

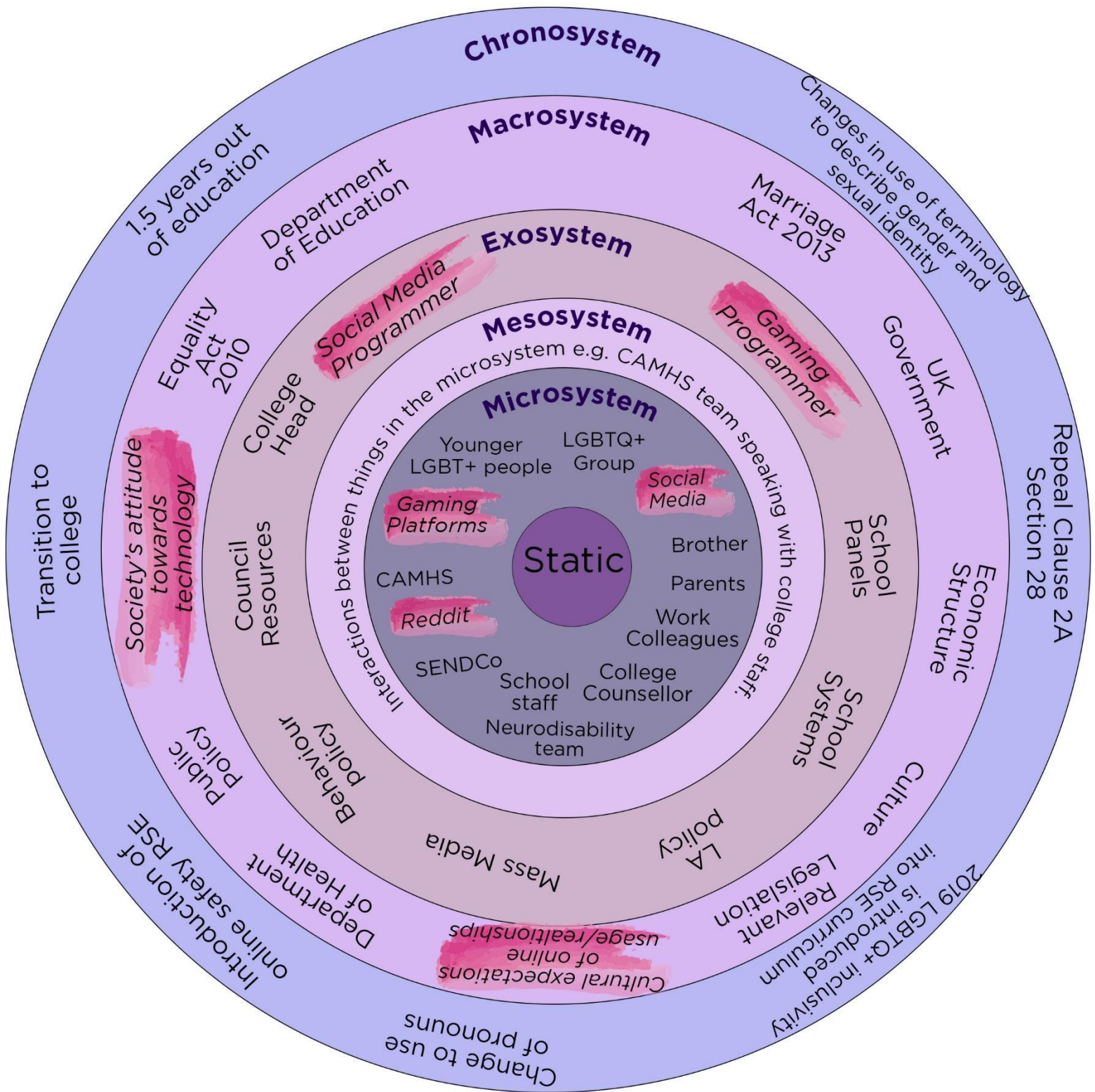


Image 3

Alex's Ecological Systems Diagram

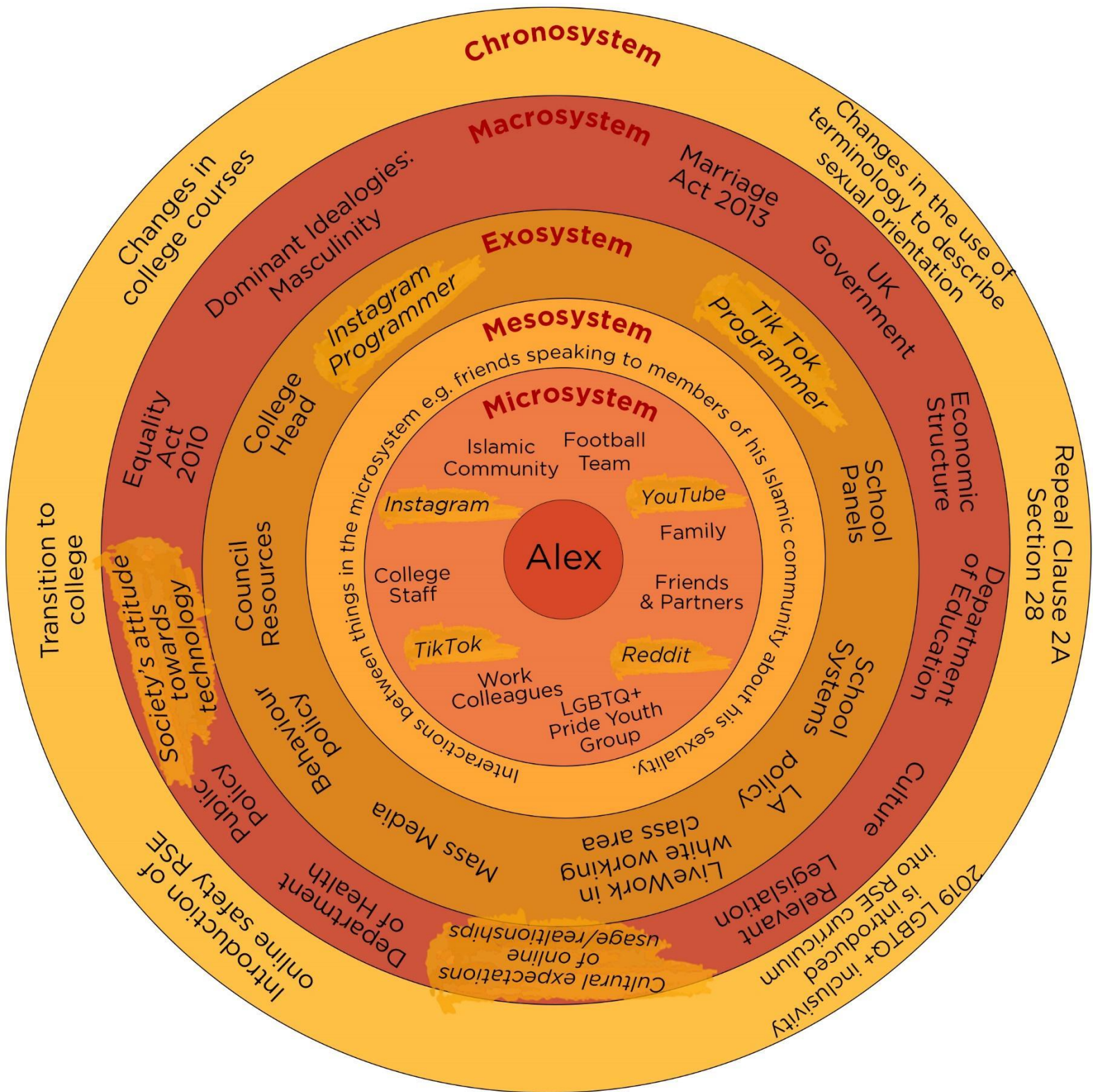
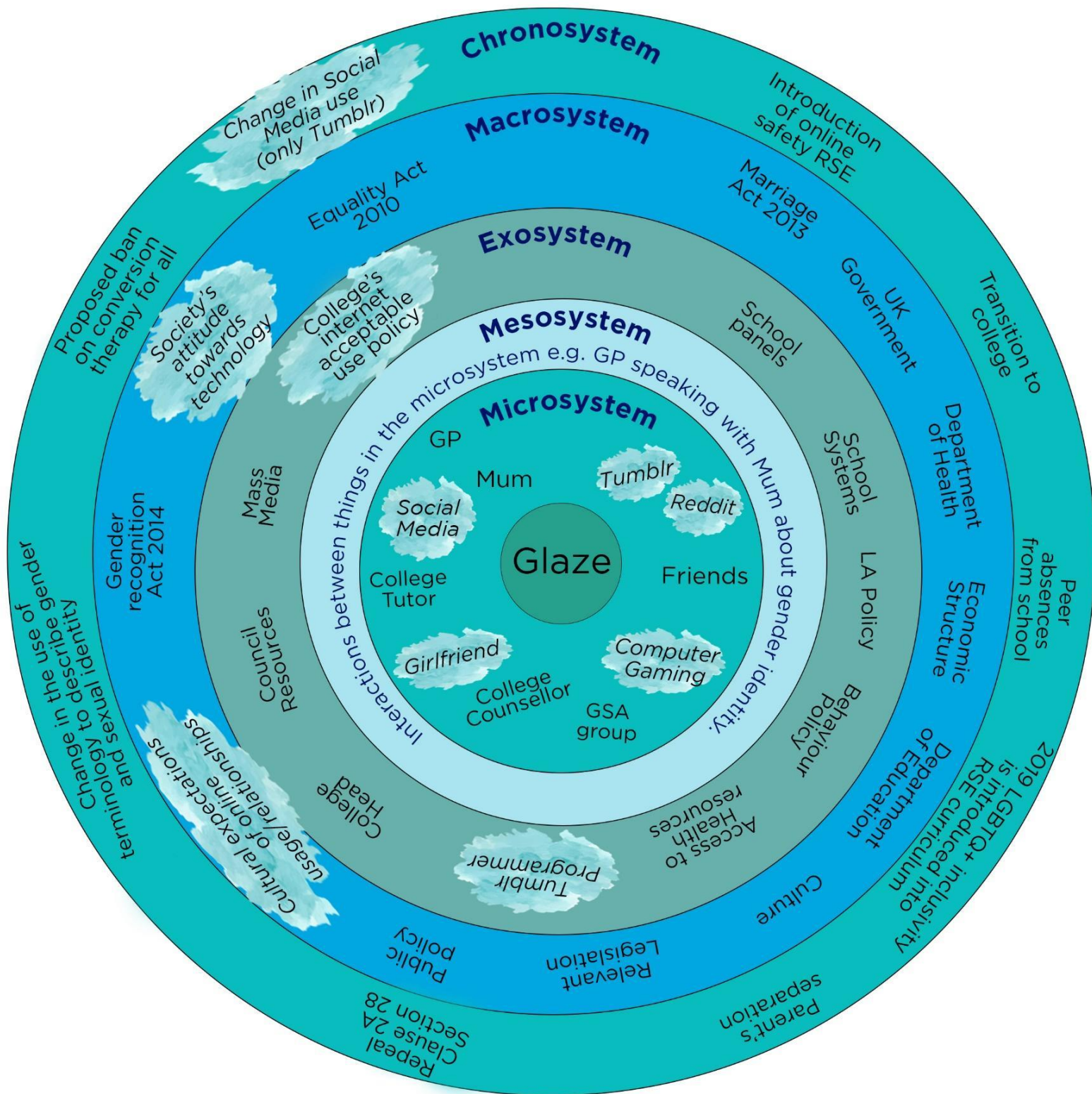


Image 4

Glaze's Ecological Systems Diagram



6.3 Research Question

How do young adults who are LGBTQ+ experience online communities during the period they attend an educational setting?

In keeping with the critical realist positionality of my research, I acknowledge that the themes I have identified are a selection of several possible common topics. I recognise that other researchers may have identified alternative themes and that I had an active role in identifying and constructing the themes throughout the research.

The research question explores the experiences of young adults during the period they attended an educational setting; as two of the participants no longer attend an educational setting, there are occasions where their experiences reflect time periods after they left school. However, on the occasions other time periods are referenced in the discussion, I felt that it provided useful insight and understanding of the participants' experiences of online communities. Therefore, their experiences have aided me in exploring the research question.

As I emphasised through the focus on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, I will consider the impact of the social and cultural context throughout the exploration of the themes. I think it is fundamental for EPs to reflect on the broader contexts they operate in and that young people live in to effectively identify appropriate support and guidance to achieve increased inclusion and understanding.

6.4 Description or Prescription, The Tension of Labels.

Static, Alex and Glaze employed specific terminology and labels to describe their sexual and gender identities, with all three describing a process of change and transition in the words that felt most fitting for their identities. However, voices of tension and conflict were present in all three narratives when discussing the words used to describe both their own identity and others.

6.4.1 Finding the Words

All three participants appeared to gain a sense of empowerment from using specific terminology and trailing the use of these labels online.

Glaze initially presented online communities as providing them with a sense of empowerment and clarity, giving him the *“words to describe myself and my identity”* (J, 4) with the protection to *“explore”* (J, 14) differing terms that would not have been possible offline. Finding specific terminology appeared to provide validation to the participants’ identities. Glaze and Alex both discovered the term bisexual and felt it accurately described them, having initially used differing terms (e.g., gay).

Pullen and Cooper’s (2010) research identified that LGBT youth utilised online communities to trial the use of specific labels in a safe and anonymous space. Pullen and Cooper (2010) echo Alex and Glaze’s reflections, who both used online platforms to present different sexual and gender identities in a space that Glaze describes as being *“where no one from real life could know who I was”* (J, 18) and *“I wasn’t going to be outed”* (J, 18-19). Voices of safety, acceptance and discovery were present across the narratives.

6.4.2 Understanding

My research indicated the clarity that specific terminology provided the participants in understanding their gender and sexual identities. All of the participants described the fluidity in their use of labels, changing the terminology they used to describe their identities and explaining that specific terminology is understood differently by people depending on the context.

Harter (1998) proposes that the use of labels during the development of a young person’s identity supports them in understanding the different components of themselves. The different parts together enable CYP to recognise their whole self coherently. Whilst Harter (1998) was addressing identity broadly, Kosciw, et al. (2015) illustrated that empowerment from using labels could promote positive wellbeing amongst LGBTQ+ young people through the process of identity consolidation.

Erikson (1968) highlights the influence of social interactions on an individual’s shaping of the world and how their sense of self develops. A core theme throughout the participant’s narratives was the impact online communities had on their exposure to specific terminology, knowledge of

LGBTQ+ subjects and the ability to present themselves in new ways. My findings suggest that online communities had a significant impact on the participant's identity development.

Rosenberg (2018) proposed that young people's exposure to peers who openly share their LGBTQ+ identity has a positive impact, as it normalises sexual identities and creates greater group and self-acceptance. Whilst Rosenberg's (2018) research provides valuable reflections on self-discovery, the research was a small sample of eight individuals based in Western Australia, limiting the generalisability of the findings. Static's narrative included the negative backlash they faced as the first person in their year group to come out. Static's experience highlights the duality of the positive impact of visible LGBTQ+ peers, alongside the need to continuously risk-assess before disclosing LGBTQ+ identities (Karami et al., 2021).

House et al. (2022) stated that LGBTQ+ labels do not have a unified understanding across all individuals or contexts, with individuals sometimes using different labels depending on the context. The different presentation of identities across contexts reflects Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1995). In line with Bronfenbrenner's understanding of the chronosystem, the influences of time and transition throughout an individual's life may also include the changes to their self-presentation and use of labels.

Formby's (2017) research outlined the importance that specific LGBTQ+ labels can have for individuals, enabling a person's identity to be understood and creating a sense of belonging with others who employ similar terms. For example, Static and their brother created a community of trusted people, identifiable by their labels because his brother *"doesn't feel safe about is, is being around around people who aren't LGBT"* (H, 320-321). Spencer and Patrick (2009) emphasise the beneficial impact connection to a support network can have for young people; their research indicates higher rates of self-esteem among individuals with social support. My discussion's attention to the increase in self-esteem and wellbeing through the use of labels I think is closely linked to Borba's (1989) building blocks of self-esteem. The building blocks are inclusive of the need for security, selfhood, affiliation, mission, and competence. A focus on a consistent sense of

belonging, a secure understanding of self-knowledge, and feeling safe are key elements of the blocks and reflect key areas raised in the interviews concerning the use of labels in online communities.

6.4.3 The Policing of Labels

Although the participants found clarity and support in their use of specific labels, voices of policing and regulation were evident in their experiences of online communities.

Glaze described experiences of online users "*policing other people's identities*," (J, 156) Glaze defines online "*policing*" (J, 156) as "*you have to sort of tick every box in a checklist*" (J, 165-166) to warrant the use of specific labels. Formby's (2017) research mirrors Glaze's narrative, with individuals often experiencing the regulation of LGBT communities as dictating the way they were able to express themselves and enforcing conformity amongst group members. Whilst Tonkiss (2003) is referencing the use of specific dress codes, they position "conformity as a condition of belonging" (p. 303). The notion of conforming in order to belong is evident in Alex's narrative; for example, he did not meet the community's expectations when he presumed the pronouns of other users and subsequently felt left out.

Moran et al. (2004) reported on a strong push for LGBTQ+ spaces to feel safe for the members and proposed that the use of expectations and regulations enables spaces to feel safe. Moran et al's. (2004) research does not explicitly refer to online spaces, but I would suggest that my research findings highlight an evident need for LGBTQ+ young people to feel safe and have their needs for connection and belonging met through online spaces, which may result in increased community regulations. Guibernau (2013) goes further to propose that the discomfort of conforming to regulations is preferable to the risk of isolation and rejection.

Formby (2022) explored the possible functions behind regulating the labels used across online LGBT communities, for example, creating a sense of safety and group cohesion. Despite this, voices of conflict and constraint were evident throughout the participant's narratives in response to the policing of specific labels. Individuals who do not fit the group's categories or expectations are further marginalised, which can be experienced as isolation and rejection (Gamson, 1995).

Interestingly, all three participants spoke about the emotional toll they experienced due to isolation and a lack of support. The participants predominantly experienced their isolation offline, but I wonder if, as all the participants identified their online communities as safe spaces, the impact of potential rejection from these communities would present similarly or would even be heightened. Fox and Ralston (2016) explore this suggestion, highlighting that the connection among the LGBTQ+ community is strengthened through shared experiences of discrimination. Therefore, the subsequent safety created online becomes imperative, negatively impacting an individual's wellbeing if the online support is removed or spoiled (Wakeford, 2002; Rostosky et al., 2010).

The policing of identities and the importance placed on using labels online amongst LGBTQ+ communities present unique challenges to the young people navigating the spaces and to the adults supporting young people who are LGBTQ+.

6.5 Another's Narrative and Me

Experiences of inter and intrapersonal conflict reoccurred throughout the narratives, centring around voices of disconnect and misunderstanding. All three participants shared stories featuring tension between how others perceived them and how they wanted their identities to be understood by others.

6.5.1 Discrimination

The presence of discrimination both on and offline impacted the way all three participants considered their gender and sexual identities, as well as the way they felt others may perceive them. Experiences of conflict led all three participants to access support online or to alter their presentation within their online communities to conform to how other users understood their identity.

Alex described the struggle one teacher faced after disclosing their LGBT+ identity and the homophobic abuse they subsequently received. Alex witnessing the abuse became a significant reason for his desire to be perceived as heterosexual, "*I needed everyone to know that wasn't me that I like girls and girls only*" (1a, 58-59). Alex's experiences display personal anguish that arose from an inner conflict of how he would like to be perceived, triggered by a social threat.

Static and Glaze's narratives discussed the misinformation and tensions towards the transgender community. Both narratives include experiences of "*transphobic hate*" offline (H, 334). Glaze and Static discussed the understanding and flexibility in support across their online communities from other LGBTQ+ users, describing how others in their offline lives do not always understand their experiences. McDermott (2015) found that LGBT youth were reluctant to use mainstream mental health services and would typically seek help for mental health concerns, including suicidal thoughts or self-harm from other LGBT youth. All three participants spoke about difficulties with their mental health, with Alex and Static both describing suicidal feelings and self-harm. All of the participants confided in their online support networks and did not trust teaching staff to understand or respect their experiences.

Jackson et al. (2018) explored an online Twitter movement and found that the advocacy and community that transgender women had created on Twitter resulted in group solidarity and empowerment. The movement corresponds with the empowerment and positive impact Glaze and Static described in their online communities in understanding their gender identities when individuals offline did not.

6.5.2 Fear Mongering

Despite the positives of seeking support from other users online, Glaze and Static described the notion of "*fear mongering*" (J, 191) based on their gender identities across online spaces.

Both participants spoke about the increased presence of Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists (Worthen, 2022) "*TERFs*" (J, 206); and the subsequent impact anti-transgender dialogue had on their access to safe online spaces. Glaze discussed that the surge of online transphobia resulted in their need to "*curate*" (J, 260) their own "*community for myself*" (J, 260). Glaze's community is predominantly through Tumblr, as he can manage the content he is exposed to more easily on that platform. Jacobsen et al. (2022) specifically researched the experiences of Tumblr amongst transgender young people and suggested that through a struggle for visibility and respect, trans users often create a "*Queer vortex*" (p. 63). The vortex is an established echo chamber,

described as a “Queer utopia” (p. 63), prioritising the needs of the trans community whilst actively overlooking the presence of outsiders, who are likely to be less trans-affirming. However, the intensity of debate on trans-Tumblr posts was noted, and it suggested that “Tumblr can be a site of identity label creation as well as one of negative intensity for trans users” (Jacobsen et al., 2022, p. 64).

Johnson (2016) highlighted that much online transgender discussion is based on a distinct gender binary, creating ‘transnormativity’, whereby individuals living outside of distinct binaries may have their identity disbelieved and become excluded from online spaces. Hudson (2017) discussed online transgender users as attempting to conform to dichotomous gender stereotypes in order to be accepted. Glaze suggested that how people express their gender online can help validate their transgender identity. They reflected this was unique to the trans community, *“If I was a cis man wearing a skirt, it would just be because skirts are cool but now it’s like, oh you are. Are you, are not really trans then?”* (J, 162-164). Glaze’s position aligns with Goffman’s (1959) self-presentation framework. The framework describes individuals as adapting their self-expression for certain audiences and contexts to manage the perceptions others may hold. Social media can present young people with an opportunity to project differing aspects of their self and express their gender and sexual identities in a more nuanced and personalised way. Therefore, the ability to adapt self-expression and presentation in different contexts can be viewed as supportive for LGBTQ+ young people (Bates et al., 2020; McAdams & McLean, 2013).

6.5.3 Masculinity

All three participants’ narratives explored the concept of masculinity, particularly the tensions around their perceived societal expectations of masculinity and their lived experiences of being men. The narratives appeared to imply that the presentation of masculinity differed on and offline, with Alex and Static retelling experiences of “hyper” (H, 329) masculinity. Static’s use of the term hypermasculinity may also be understood as “toxic masculinity” (Harrington, 2021, p.342),

which refers to the heteronormative lens of masculinity often regarding homophobic and misogynist aggression displayed or societally expected from men.

Alex discussed their assimilation to masculinity through their choice of language “*you’re all butters, get me a fit bird*” (Ia, 24). Alex’s language appears to be based upon his exposure to male peers and role models, indicative of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) microsystem in the ecological systems theory. Orne (2011) explores Goffman’s (1968) impression management, describing that individuals who occupy stigmatised identities adopt strategies to manage the ways they present themselves to safeguard coming out to specific audiences or environments. I think my research indicates that online spaces often provided the participants with a space to present identities that resisted their understanding of idealised masculinity.

6.5.4 Impression Management

Goffman (1959; 1968) discussed how societal expectations of certain roles and identities require specific performances. Goffman (1968) highlights that individuals who occupy stigmatised identities, particularly members of the LGBTQ+ community, often face difficulty in knowing how others perceive them and therefore have to display greater self-vigilance within the impressions they make. All three participants discussed the difficulty in presenting non-binary sexual identities, as they are all attracted to more than one gender.

Static and Glaze discussed the hyper-sexualisation of their sexualities and the understanding others appear to have, such as “*you’re greedy or (2) you want to have ‘group times’*” (H, 299-300). Alex’s narrative discussed the misconceptions of bisexuality, with the gender of his partner appearing to be indicative of a binary understanding of his sexual identity. Boccone (2016) outlined the unique challenges individuals who identify as bisexual face, with the gender of a partner often being considered the defining feature of an individual’s sexuality. Callis (2013) identified a commonly held view that individuals who are bisexual are dangerous and untrustworthy, and as reflected in Glaze and Static’s narratives, there is a hypersexualised understanding of bisexuality, particularly online. My findings indicate a lack of predictability or consistency across the social expectations that

appear to operate across micro-social environments. I wonder if this indicates that an intense level of vigilance and impression management (Goffman, 1968) is required in order to remain safe, illustrating the need for safe spaces.

Reflection: Many of the discussions that all three participants raised about their sexual identities and the literature exploring the experiences of bisexuality is indicative of my hesitation to explicitly outline my identity as a bi woman within this research. The tensions were centred around presenting an identity that is commonly hypersexualised and often synonymous with indecisiveness or inauthenticity (Smith et al., 2022; DeLucia & Smith, 2021). I recognise my want to manage the identity that I present to others, particularly in a professional context and perhaps the separation I often try to create between the identities I present as a practitioner and within my personal life. I acknowledge my personal experiences and connection to this area and how these have subsequently impacted on the areas I have chosen to explore in greater detail.

6.5.5 The Role of Teaching Staff

Glaze, Alex and Static all discussed the role of teachers in exacerbating the tensions between how they wanted to be perceived by others and how they were. Static and Glaze's narratives contained voices that lacked acknowledgement or support from teaching staff. Static was told he had to change for P.E. in the staffroom, creating an understanding that he was a threat to other students.

Alex discussed how witnessing a teacher being subjected to homophobic abuse from students impacted the idealised version of how he wanted to present his sexual orientation. There was an evident lack of support for the teacher Alex described, where the response was to prevent LGBTQ+ staff from disclosing their identities to students, suggesting the way staff presented their identities was controlled by school leaders (Goffman, 1968). Saxey's (2020) research indicated that LGBTQ+ staff are often placed into a role where they are expected to take the lead on LGBTQ+ matters in school, positioned as an expert, or alternatively made to feel that coming out in a school setting is bad practice.

All three participants spoke about their want for greater LGBTQ+ visibility in schools and access to role models, yet the school environments appeared in opposition to this, suggesting the impact at an exosystemic level.

6.6 Finding Home; Refuge and Belonging in Online Spaces.

Voices of belonging and acceptance were prominent across the narratives. All three participants discussed seeking belonging online after experiencing negativity because of their sexual and gender identities. Whilst not the term the participants used to describe the incidents, it appears that for all three participants, these were periods of crisis. The incidents each participant experienced seem to have been exacerbated by a distinct lack of support or acknowledgement from school staff.

6.6.1 A Refuge from Harm

All three participants' descriptions of the impact online communities had were emotive and highlighted the significance of the communities in their lives. Alex felt that "*there was a place for me*" (Ib, 118-119), and Static expressed the difficulty in articulating the positive impact "*it can be difficult to comprehend the extent to the impact the support had*" (H, 221-222). Although the online communities were joined amid distress and challenge, it appears the participants all experienced online communities as a refuge. Pascar et al. (2022) discussed the existence of Queer safe spaces as a refuge from societal harm, to provide individuals with the space to engage in personal and social action enabling individuals to explore their identity.

6.6.2 Rejection

The impact of fear and rejection on the participants was evident across the narratives, with all the participants needing time out of education for varying lengths of time. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs highlights the fundamental need for young people to feel safe and to have a secure sense of belonging in order to access their learning. The distinct lack of safety or belonging that the participants felt at school may have impacted their ability to access their learning or attend an educational setting.

The fear of rejection from school staff led Glaze to avoid seeking support or reassurance from teachers, *“I wanted the adults in my life to support and accept me and I think knowing that was not going to be there and I could experience that er that harm from them felt (.) too er risky”* (J, 61-62). The fear of peer rejection led to Alex being unable to disclose his identity offline. Rostosky et al. (2021) proposed that LGBTQ+ young people experience hypervigilance in response to experiences of rejection, which is a tool to provide a greater sense of control and perceived safety towards people they meet.

Meyer’s (2003) minority stress theory describes that the prolonged and persistent stress people of marginalised sexual identities experience leads to a higher risk of adverse mental health outcomes (Baams et al., 2015). Horton (2022) carried out research that focused on the gender minority stress that young people who are transgender in UK schools face. One specific area of minority stress Horton (2022) identifies is the experience of rejection from peers and school staff, which has a detrimental impact on young people’s emotional wellbeing and ability to trust teaching staff.

Travers et al’s. (2020) research examined the risk factors for experiencing mental health issues among individuals who are lesbian, gay or bisexual and identified that the presence of secure social support had a significantly positive influence on an individual’s ability to overcome the effect of minority stress (Meyer, 2003). McMillian and Chavis (1986) suggest that creating a community is achieved through a sense of belonging alongside a shared understanding that the group will meet the needs of other members, with each member being valued. All three participants’ experiences of how belonging was felt within online communities differed, but their experiences of being included and valued in their communities were unanimously shared. Alex described that even through active engagement of content creators, *“you are like erm part of that like group”* (Ib, 96).

6.6.3 Family

The concept of a ‘chosen family’ or ‘families we choose’ is common throughout literature surrounding the experiences of members of the LGBTQ+ community (Hiebert & Kortess-Miller, 2021;

Fish et al., 2020; Hailey, Burton & Arscott, 2020; Weston, 1991). Unfortunately, many LGBTQ+ individuals face isolation and rejection when coming out or when their LGBTQ+ identities are revealed to family members; individuals create the concept of family through close friends (Breakwell & Jaspal, 2021).

Static, Glaze and Alex discussed their families' response to their LGBTQ+ identities. Alex and Glaze spoke about the difficulties in sharing their identities with their family. Whilst Glaze did eventually experience acceptance, Alex discussed the lack of understanding his mum displayed, appearing to place conditions on her love based upon the gender of his partner "*I love you but I'm so glad it was just a phase with the boys*" (1a, 356). Families appeared to substantially influence the participants seeking a sense of belonging online. Hiebert and Kortess-Miller (2021) researched experiences of finding home on the social media platform TikTok. Young LGBTQ+ users in their research were able to access acceptance and belonging from others despite experiences of rejection or abuse from family members. Yuval-Davis (2006a) defines belonging as being "about emotional attachment, about feeling at home and [...] feeling safe" (p.197).

Static positions himself as a "*Queer parent*" (H, 87) who is "*very very protective*" (H, 193) of other members of the LGBTQ+ community. The role of providing a sense of belonging and giving back to the community is echoed within Austin et al.'s. (2020) research, which outlined that young people who are gender diverse described the internet as saving their lives, a sentiment shared by Static. The creation of belonging and a sense of family in LGBTQ+ online communities is evident across the participants' narratives and within the literature (Ehrenschaft, 2016; Tishelman et al., 2015; Yadegardfard et al., 2014). Creating close family-like connections, alongside the impact of negative experiences from family members, indicates the microsystem within Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systemic theory. Regular and close contact with family members will likely impact an individual's view of themselves and the world (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). However, I am not claiming that online communities counteract experiences of rejection or harm from families.

Milton and Knutson (2021) suggest that members of the LGBTQ+ community feel the most support from their chosen families, but the support from families of origin appears to have the greatest influence on positive mental health. The positive impact of gaining a sense of belonging and acceptance was evident for all the participants in this research.

I think my findings suggest that the connections participants created online were important relationships in their micro-systems. I think through online communities, the strength of the participants' close support in their microsystems enabled them to feel better equipped to cope with the impact of situations in wider ecosystems. For example, Static and Glaze described their engagement in activism to fight against anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. Additionally, all three participants felt more able to attend school despite experiencing discrimination in settings that lacked inclusive policies. It appears that online communities may provide a valuable function in affording young people a secure sense of belonging while mediating the relationships between an individual and their ecosystem.

6.6.4 Intersectionality

The intersectionality of the participant's identities was an important aspect of finding a secure sense of belonging. Voices of belonging, acceptance and comfort were heard in Alex's narrative when describing the experience of discovering and engaging with Queer Muslim content creators. From questioning if he was haram due to his sexual orientation to "*having people that will understand or try to understand how you're feeling*" (Ib, 159) allowed Alex to feel that "*there was a place for me*" (Ib, 118-119). Alex saw his search for belonging reflected back in other online users who were young Muslim members of the LGBTQ+ community. Their shared experience emphasises the importance of recognising intersectionality in identity. Online influencers often stress the importance of safety when coming out and recognise the experiences of young people feeling haram (Hiebert & Kortés-Miller, 2021). My research highlights the unique experiences of each participant's sense of belonging and the differences in both the support and community they appeared to have sought.

6.7 Pride, Prejudice and Acts of Resistance.

I noted a tension across the participant's narratives between the sense of pride and acceptance they experienced through engaging with online communities and the perceived stigma and shame they felt from accessing support and developing a community online.

6.7.1 Stigma

Goffman's theory of stigma (1968) defines stigma as "undesired differentness" (p.5), based upon the value and meaning that society has placed on specific attributes or identities. All three participants allude to an experience of difference based on their sexual and gender identities, alongside their engagement in online communities.

Glaze and Static's membership to online communities is a core element of their identities, emphasised in their use of online usernames as their pseudonyms, and yet they still experienced a lack of understanding of their engagement in online communities from adults. Goffman's theory of stigma (1968) proposes that experiences of stigma lead to a lack of societal acceptance due to what Goffman describes as a spoiled identity. Spoiled identities can result in individuals attempting to manage how their identities are presented, which I explored in previous themes in this discussion. The lack of understanding the participants experienced concerning their engagement in online communities is well connected to Winstone et al's. (2021) research which indicated that young people felt that adults only focused on the dangers of online communities without recognising the positive elements.

Alex initially described their engagement with online communities as a "*guilty pleasure*" (Ia, 104), and both Alex and Static appeared to use the research interviews to resist possible misconceptions about online communities. Alex describes experiences that suggest internalised stigma, pre-warning elements of his narrative with an awareness of how others may perceive it when discussing meeting a romantic partner online "*I know. I know. I don't want to be that person*", (Ia, 148-149) despite identifying the partnership as enabling him to feel like himself. Finlay-Jones et al. (2021) suggested that young adults who are LGBTQ+ often internalise stigma in response to minority stress as a means of coping with discrimination and shame. Finlay-Jones et al. (2021)

propose that internalisation reduces feelings of rejection if an individual has taken on those beliefs (Meyer, 2003). School environments are a core element of a young person's microsystem, where they spend extensive lengths of time. As a result, the attitudes and understanding they experience in a school environment with regard to both the communities they engage with, and their self-presentation are likely to have a persistent impact on how they view themselves (Renold, 2001). I believe that the findings in this thesis support an understanding of stigma's role in how online communities are experienced by young adults who are LGBTQ+, as proposed in pre-existing research (DeHaan et al., 2012).

6.7.2 Resistance

All of the participants' narratives included experiences of resistance on and offline. For example, resisting the acceptance of government legislation that impacts the LGBTQ+ community was described in Glaze and Static's narrative, as well as the resistance towards figures that pose a risk of threat to the safety of community members.

Glaze described the "*constant source of support*" (J, 237) the Harry Potter books had for him growing up, but the author's vocal transphobic hate led to them rejecting their connection to the author and their work and encouraging resistance against the author to others. Glaze and Static's experiences online enabled active participation in acts of resistance, for example, through signing petitions or sharing the details of marches with other users. Glaze simultaneously describes the experiences of curating and limiting their exposure to resistance from individuals who deny the legitimacy of the transgender community, such as J.K. Rowling.

Erlick (2018) writes about the necessity of online activism amongst young people who are transgender and are subjected to hate. Erlick (2018) suggested that the collective resistance provided young people with a sense of agency and hope but highlighted that the activism needed to take place in physically and mentally safe online places. I think all the participants considered their online communities as safe spaces. My findings support Erlick's (2018) conclusion that whilst resistance is necessary, it is time-consuming and often exhausting for young people. The impact of

online activism extends across multiple micro-systems, such as collective action taking place at a micro-systemic level, with attempts to disrupt the wider macro and ecosystems.

6.7.3 Homogeneity

Assumed homogeneity is an area that Formby (2017) outlines as reoccurring throughout perspectives of LGBTQ+ communities. Formby (2017) identifies that finding commonalities and collective experiences amongst LGBTQ+ communities is impactful and often elicits a sense of pride. However, some experiences and identities are subsequently disregarded, reflecting a need for intersectionality in the discussions surrounding LGBTQ+ communities.

The participants' experiences of online communities and their descriptions of resistance are not homogenous. Alex's experiences of online communities were centred around a want to be normal, as his peers appeared to identify within heteronormative and cisnormative societal ideals. His experiences of shame and jealousy led him to seek support in online communities. The perceived stigma of existing outside of the heteronormative focus led him to engage in online communities for connection and understanding. Bradford and Clark (2012) described that the stigma experienced by LGBTQ+ young people was because of prolonged exposure to heteronormative environments. As a result, young people are often only comfortable presenting their LGBTQ+ identities in anonymous spaces or when they are separate from their everyday lives, both are key aspects of online communities.

Static presented a very different experience of resistance related to the notion of normative. Static presents the intersectionality of their identity, "*I was diagnosed with both autism and ADHD, so my brain already works different*" (H, 215-216), initially comparing their brain working as different from the norm but then adjusting their language. Static appeared to gain empowerment from the rejection of normative standards. Their neurodivergent profile, alongside their LGBTQ+ identity, appears to be important to their reasons for engaging in online communities and the platforms they choose, for example, online gaming. Cain and Velasco (2020) described the empowerment and pride experienced in the rejection of norms by an individual who has an ASD profile and is a member of

the LGBTQ+ community. The intersections of their identity were important to their experience of online communities. Cain and Velasco's (2020) research is centralised on one individual's experiences; thereby, the difficulties in generalising the findings are shared with my small sample research. However, the research provides a useful commentary and draws some similarities with the experiences of the research participants.

The heterogeneity across the participants' narratives emphasises the importance of considering young people in the context of their environments. The example of normal being understood differently by Static and Alex may highlight the impact their lived experiences and ecosystems have had, for example, cultural attitudes at a macrosystemic level. Moving forward, I think it will be beneficial for educational professionals to carefully consider the use of eco-systemic perspectives when supporting young people who are LGBTQ+.

6.8 Implications for Professional Practice

It is important to consider what educational professionals can learn from the research project, considering the implications for educational settings and the professionals working within them, and the implications for EP practice.

6.8.1 Educational Settings

Educational settings are a fundamental component of a young person's microsystem, and in keeping with the emancipatory aims of my research project, it is important to consider what educational professionals can learn from this research. I think it has been useful to consider the implications at both an individual level, focusing on individual educational staff and then at a systemic level, to ascertain the possible changes in systems and at whole school levels.

6.8.2 Individual Educational Professionals

My research highlights how teaching staff can impact young people's view of themselves, particularly in response to their gender or sexual identity. I believe the recurrent stories of teaching staff not supporting, acknowledging or consistently safeguarding the participants demonstrates how educational professionals can feed into negative narratives of the LGBTQ+ community. My research highlights that educational settings need to consider how the staff body can foster a sense of

community and belonging for all students, including members of the LGBTQ+ community. Given that CYP are the knowledge holders and experts of their individual experiences, educational professionals should consider working collaboratively with YP to increase their understanding of LGBTQ+ CYPs lived experiences to support a sense of community and acceptance.

Phelan's (2008) article exploring therapeutic connections further emphasises the importance of educational professionals developing a secure understanding and sense of empathy towards the issues faced by LGBTQ+ CYP. Phelan (2008) details the impact consistent and non-judgmental support can have in building secure relationships, thereby allowing CYP to consider the ecosystem that surrounds them. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Phelan (2008) highlights that relational support is needed to help young people navigate complex and sometimes challenging systems. Consideration of the multifaceted layers of social environments may enable a transition between different ecological systems, whereby CYP have a positive understanding of themselves in the world and a connection to the different systems and factors that operate in society (Phelan, 2008). Austin and Haplin (1987) outlined that adults demonstrating consistent, non-judgmental and unconditional approaches to young people is vital to support the development of secure relationships between teachers and students. Bruner (1990) emphasised that adults need to show young people that they can be trusted, for example, by modelling asking for help and making a considered effort to engage in conversations of interest to the young person.

Engagement in topics of interest to young people is likely a supportive strategy for professionals to acknowledge the importance of online communities for CYP through a non-stigmatising approach. My research has drawn attention to the stigma that CYP often face from adults regarding their engagement with online communities. Experiences of stigma are likely to make CYP feel unsafe and unsupported in school settings (Orne, 2011). However, the need for young people to feel safe in order to engage in their learning is well cited across educational literature (Maslow, 1943; Pepper & Brill, 2008), which includes access to learning environments free from discrimination. My findings, therefore, outline that educational professionals should acknowledge

the positive impact that online communities can have on young people in the LGBTQ+ community. For example, suppose a CYP initiates a conversation around their activity online. In that case, the default response should not be reminders of the harm of social media or high-screen time but instead to engage with the CYP's experiences through non-judgmental active listening.

Whilst the social communication skills that are required to build and maintain connections may differ from offline relationships (Amichai-Hamburger et al., 2013), if professionals are supporting CYP's social skills or facilitating friendship interventions, it is important to acknowledge online connections as real and important. For instance, by referencing friendships that a CYP has made through their online community, teaching staff signal to the CYP the validity of the connections built.

The importance of professionals acknowledging LGBTQ+ CYP, extends beyond the importance of online communities and includes the acknowledgement of terminology used by young people to describe their gender or sexual identities. My research indicates the possible benefits young people experience when using labels, with all three participants referring to the positive impact specific labels had on their ability to understand and explain their identity. These benefits highlight the likely positive impact of educational professionals being open to discussing and learning about LGBTQ+ terminology and using the correct pronouns and terminology when talking to and about CYP. Educational professionals adopting a curiosity to learn and an openness to being corrected, for example, in their use of language, is likely to create the modelling and scaffolding for students to feel safe expressing their sexual and gender identities and foster greater understanding.

6.8.3 Systemic Implications

Importantly, building inclusive communities in educational settings goes beyond the scope of individual teaching staff and requires system-wide considerations.

When faced with some of the dilemmas that arise through acknowledging diversity, such as the need for gender-neutral facilities, it appears that settings retreat to heteronormative stances, as demonstrated in Static's experience of changing in an occupied staff room. School systems and

policies are not currently at a point where implementing gender-neutral facilities on a large scale is feasible or likely. Despite that, my research findings suggest that appropriate alternatives need to be considered in collaboration with relevant students to ensure that students are not further isolated and understand they are valued in the school community. Enhancing the value and respect of the LGBTQ+ community may be encouraged both through consultations with the student body and greater visibility and acceptance from teaching staff of gender diversity.

Calvard et al. (2020) recognised the positive impact of staff wearing pride lanyards in educational settings. However, they drew specific attention to the caution needed as visibility in this way can often be tokenistic, with staff who utilise visible symbols also needing sufficient knowledge and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community (Calvard et al., 2020). Given that all the participants shared a greater need for emotional and mental support in school but experienced challenges in confiding in teaching staff, it may suggest that a greater emphasis on LGBTQ+ visibility in schools may support resisting heteronormativity in educational settings.

DePalma and Atkinson (2009) explored how small acts of resistance in school settings can confront long-standing cisnormative and heteronormative practices that contribute to CYP feeling stigmatised. Examples of resistance include staff addressing all homophobic language used by students and ensuring that LGBTQ+ topics were not only explored in the context of relationships and sex education to resist the often-hypersexualised view of the LGBTQ+ community. School staff are likely to learn important lessons from CYP's acts of resistance to cisnormative and heteronormative school environments. School leaders should try to emulate these acts of resistance to support positive change and inclusion for all CYP.

An important aspect of fostering belonging and tackling stigma present in educational settings is integrating LGBTQ+ topics and key figures into the entire curriculum, as suggested by Formby (2015). Integration of LGBTQ+ topics ensures discussions around LGBTQ+ topics are normalised and encouraged, developing acceptance on a curriculum-wide level. Therefore, school leaders should support teaching staff to incorporate LGBTQ+ topics into their lessons. Appropriate and regular

professional development as well as department level support to find appropriate and relevant topics to incorporate into the curriculum, is likely to be beneficial.

Glaze's reference to online communities becoming shut off to ideas or information outside of their community, referred to online as a "circle jerk" (J, 262), highlights possible implications for educational professionals. Explicitly teaching critical thinking skills to young people across the curriculum may provide students with the skills to apply critical thinking to information they encounter online independently. Kong (2015) researched the pedagogical approaches that can be effective in teaching critical learning skills. Whilst their research was based in Hong Kong, where attitudes and exposure to digital resources are likely to differ from the UK, it provided a useful insight into the importance of integrating time into lessons to discuss digital resources in order to meaningfully apply critical skills to online platforms (Kong, 2015). As identified in my literature review, the Department for Education (2019) has included online safety in the RSE curriculum. However, the guidance is very broad, with the Department for Education's training on teaching internet safety emphasising the danger of relying on online relationships (DfE, 2020) instead of recognising their value. The guidance does, however, include the need for critical thinking (DfE, 2020).

Working towards systemic change in school settings is likely to lead to long-lasting and more meaningful change (Malmquist et al., 2013). Utilising the areas of interest of students engaging in social action within online communities may be helpful to display collective action where appropriate, as well as promoting a sense of acceptance. In addition, engaging in areas of action and interest to young people may support bridging the gap between communities online and the school environment to broaden the support network of members of the LGBTQ+ communities and other marginalised communities.

6.8.4 Educational Psychology Practice

Through my thesis' discussion, important implications for EP practice have become evident, particularly as a result of the implications for educational settings. I think that EPs are placed in a valuable and unique position in their ability to work at an individual level with CYP, families and

educational professionals, but they are also able to engage in systemic work, for example, at a whole-school level. In order to outline what EPs can learn from this research, I have considered implications at both an individual level and at a wider systemic level, as both are key aspects of the professional role.

6.8.5 Individual Educational Psychology Practice

A fundamental aspect of the EP role is gathering the views of young people; the participants described the unique and specific difficulties they faced and the lack of supportive relationships with staff. Therefore, it is essential that EPs carefully consider the tools and strategies they use to listen to the voices of young LGBTQ+ people. Whilst Yavuz (2016) proposes that EPs should rarely need to work directly with young people, the research participants' narratives indicated a lack of available adults to gather their views. Listening to the views of young people is likely to inform development that may be helpful for professional practice. The participant's experiences of support highlight the benefit person-centred approaches to support are likely to have, ensuring that EPs are able to listen to CYP's views and advocate for them effectively.

All three of the participants shared that one of the initial drivers for them seeking support through online communities was the response from family members regarding their LGBTQ+ identity. My discussion indicates the often-strained relationships between young people who are LGBTQ+ and their families. EP work is bound by a legal framework, for example, both the Children's and Families Act (2014) and the SEND Code of Practice (2015) outline a legal obligation to gather the views of parents and carers. Gathering parent and carer views is an essential and important aspect of all EP work. However, consideration must still be given to how the views of parents and carers are reported. My research indicates that EPs have to balance the tension between the legal obligation to accurately report on the views of parents and carers and their role in advocating for CYP. For EP's, there is an additional challenge that in reporting parent and carer's views, there is a risk of further damaging already strained relationships.

The participant's experiences of having information regarding their gender and sexual identities shared with guardians without their consent, I think, alludes to a possible hierarchy of views, whereby the views of parents or carers may be considered to have greater importance or legitimacy than young people's, which needs careful consideration. My research indicated a risk that a parent's perception of a child might be valued more highly than a child's view of themselves, particularly when CYP are conceptualised as vulnerable.

Glaze discussed their experience of having professionals deadname (see Table 1 on page 9 for a definition) them following a request from their mum. Glaze's experience highlights the challenge for EPs, who need to carefully consider how situations like this are handled so that they can both accurately report the views of the parent and carers while respecting the identity of CYP. Smilie and Newton (2020) acknowledge the conflict between EPs wanting to represent the views of young people accurately and needing to manage potential risks and difficulties, including reporting views that may suggest a lack of support from teaching staff. Whilst their research is not specific to working with members of the LGBTQ+ community, it provides useful considerations for practice. Ensuring young people are aware of what information will be shared and with whom to ensure a greater level of autonomy is gained and that young people who are LGBTQ+ are appropriately safeguarded is essential.

It is important that EPs work with young people rather than do to young people (Billington, 2006). My research demonstrates that CYP need allies to support their recognition. If EPs support invalidating practices, such as the use of deadnames, they risk harming CYP who are already vulnerable and exposed to harmful situations in systems; they should feel safe, secure and like they belong.

The BPS states that psychologists are "encouraged to use the preferred language of gender, sexuality and relationship diverse people" (BPS, 2019, p. 9). My findings indicate that when care and consideration is taken in respecting the language and terminology CYP use, it can be a mechanism by which a sense of psychological connection and belonging is nurtured. I wonder if there is a greater

need to respect preferred language than the wording of 'encourage' suggested in the BPS guidelines. Glaze spoke about their want for acknowledgement of their sexual identity from professionals and adults, and it is likely to support an ethical approach to EP practice in considering the ways in which we speak to and about young people, as encouraged by Billington (2006).

6.8.6 Systemic Role of Educational Psychologists

EPs' systemic role in schools is important, often supporting schools to implement relational behaviour policies, make whole-school changes and to facilitate professional development for educational professionals (Allen et al., 2022).

It is core to EP professional competencies and ethics that in their work, they should "consider engaging with the wider socio-political context regarding sexual and gender minorities in order to reduce social stigma" (BPS, 2017, p. 34). The evidence gathered through this research project indicated that it is perhaps imperative that EPs work with CYP who are LGBTQ+ to remain informed in a changing context and ensure that support for LGBTQ+ CYP is effective and appropriate. Through continued development and understanding of the areas of concern and where support may be most appropriate, EPs are in a useful position to support teachers. Whilst teaching sexual orientation and family diversity is mandatory in the UK curriculum (DfE, 2019), teachers have expressed feelings of discomfort and a lack of competence in teaching these areas of the curriculum (Goldstein-Shultz, 2022). Therefore, EPs may further support at a systemic level in delivering training on relevant topics and exploring possible unconscious bias of teaching staff to increase teaching competence and support to reduce stigma in school settings.

Formby (2015) stressed the significance of a school policy that challenges and opposes all forms of oppression and resists normative approaches towards gender and sexuality. Therefore, in a systemic capacity, EPs can support schools in their journey to address experiences of stigma, discrimination and a lack of support, which all the participants described in their narratives.

In addition to whole school training and policies, the discussion highlighted the position LGBTQ+ teachers can often be placed in and the reliance schools have in utilising these teachers'

perceived areas of knowledge. EPs can support schools in being a critical friend and questioning the position teachers are placed in, ensuring the emotional labour and burden is not placed on specific staff due to their LGBTQ+ identities (Duchense & McMaugh, 2019). EPs taking subtle approaches to practice, such as the role of a critical friend in a systemic role, can support small and gradual changes in educational settings, particularly as significant organisational change is often very slow and challenging (Fox, 2009).

6.9 Reflections on Educational Psychologists Engaging in Systemic Change

Reflecting on the difficulties with organisational level change, I think is important to ascertain what educational professionals can learn from this research project and the likelihood of this thesis benefiting young people who are LGBTQ+, in keeping with the research's emancipatory aims (Noel, 2016).

Winward (2015) suggested that traded models of Educational Psychology Service (EPS) delivery, whereby educational settings buy in packages of support from the EPS, present specific challenges for EPs to engage in systemic work, as settings typically direct work. Despite the challenges, some EPS's have incorporated systemic-level work into their packages of support. A specific example is Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council EPS, who partnered with the parent and carer forum to create Genuine Partnerships, a nationally recognised co-produced commissioned service supporting organisations to embed partnership working and inclusive practice with substantial success (Genuine Partnerships, 2023). Rotherham EPS exemplifies the ability of EPS's to support systemic change and organisational level work, to increase the inclusion of CYP who are LGBTQ+. However, as Rotherham EPS are likely to have done, Richards (2017) highlights that EPs need to remain vigilant for opportunities and openings to introduce organisational work. I think my research indicates that it is essential for EPs to be open to initiating work and conversations regarding support for LGBTQ+ CYP, including responses to online engagement.

For EPs to effectively initiate and facilitate organisational-level work, Kumar (1999) highlights that individuals must identify all factors supporting and hindering a proposed change in an

organisation. Acknowledging all possible changes is crucial because change typically takes place when there is a disruption to the equilibrium of how a system operates, so it is important to ascertain what aspects of the system need specific attention to ensure the change is positive and long-lasting (Shrivastava et al., 2017). Queer theory illustrates how society considers heterosexuality the only natural and normal sexual expression (Pascoe, 2007). As my research project has identified, individuals who benefit from heteronormative standards are subsequently afforded power and privilege, which exacerbates incidents of discrimination towards the LGBTQ+ community (Rubin, 1984). In order for real change to take place towards the inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community, it requires individuals who exist outside of the LGBTQ+ community to acknowledge their privilege to redress societal power imbalances (Rao & Kelleher, 2005).

It is difficult and uncomfortable for a privileged group to relinquish power; even when there are attempts to support a marginalised group, there is often a desire for support, not to lessen the status or position of a privileged group (McIntosh 1989). However, I wonder if the EP profession is willing to begin to relinquish the power it holds. Historically EPs were placed in a role to identify normative CYP predominantly through psychometric assessments (Woods & Farrell, 2006). Resistance to the role led to a reconstruction of the profession, which moved away from medical understandings of CYP and included systemic level work (Gilham, 1978; Lidz, 1992). However, EPs kept hold of arguably harmful approaches to practice, such as psychometric assessments (Alloway & Alloway, 2010; Scar, 1984; Love, 2009; Farrell & Venables, 2009), to retain a position of legitimacy to perform their statutory role (Quicke, 1982). The choice to reconstruct as opposed to deconstruct the profession perhaps indicates that the power and status EPs hold is important to the profession and will take consistent and long-term action to resist. Pascoe (2007) highlights that relinquishing the power of privileged positions extends far beyond individuals and requires careful systemic work.

When considering the possibility of change, I think it is crucial for EPs to acknowledge the historical context of the profession. Future research identifying the helping and hindering factors of

EPs ability to adapt practice and facilitate organisational-level work to support LGBTQ+ CYP and to resist heteronormative and cisnormative ideals effectively will be beneficial.

6.10 Future Research Recommendations

I believe that subsequent research studies should expand on this thesis. Examining the specific roles of online communities may provide a greater understanding for educational professionals on the types of support and information that young people may seek online.

Additionally, I think it will be beneficial for subsequent research to adapt the participant recruitment criterion I used in my research project and explore the experiences of individuals who are female members of the LGBTQ+ community. Narratives in this research highlighted the experiences of the hypersexualisation of female, Queer students, which I think would benefit the EP community to better understand the role of online communities and examine possible diversity in experiences.

The research project only included participants who were 18 and above, and therefore research that explores the experiences of online communities amongst LGBTQ+ young people who are still in compulsory education, I think would be particularly valuable.

6.11 Limitations

The age of my participant sample was a particular limitation of the research study. Due to ethical considerations and wanting to ensure that eligible participants could participate regardless of being out or supported by the parents and carers, I could not recruit participants younger than 18. Fletcher's (2022) research on the experiences of LGBTQ+ identifying adolescents experienced significant difficulty recruiting participants under 18 because parents and carers needed to contact the researcher and provide consent. Therefore, I felt both the ethical and practical implications of participants under 18 would make the research project too difficult. However, as two of the participants no longer attended any educational setting, educational and cultural changes are likely to have taken place since they left.

I aimed to centralise the participants' narratives throughout my research, in line with my critical realist positionality. I wanted to ensure the individual experiences were the focus of the research, recognising each participant's distinct social and environmental factors as demonstrated in using the ecological systems diagrams (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). However, it consequently means that generalisability is a possible thesis limitation. Nevertheless, my research is detailed in its aims to explore the participants' individual experiences, and whilst it is not possible nor appropriate to generalise the findings, the participants' stories have indicated possible implications for professional practice.

I have reflected on my active role in the participant's interviews, with my questioning and comments forming a co-constructed narrative. Therefore, I know I may have influenced the stories participants shared. I have also considered that a lack of specific questioning may have prevented key narratives or experiences from being shared. Through the phased approach of the research, I was careful to work with the participants to provide them with the space to consider the stories they wanted to share, and I was careful from which narratives I sought further information or expansion, as I wanted to ensure participants did not feel compelled to share narratives or further details. As discussed in the analysis of the thesis, I acknowledge that it is likely that alternative themes would have been recognised by different researchers because of the subjective nature of my thesis.

The introductory meeting included a creative-based task where participants considered differences between their lives on and offline; the task created interesting and insightful conversations. However, I used the creative activity to build rapport and enable participants to consider the areas they wished to discuss during the narrative interview. The focus of the research was based on the spoken narrative narratives, which may be a limitation of the thesis; incorporating creative and visual analysis may have provided additional information and insight.

I am also aware of my investment and connection to the research project. Whilst the area of online communities was new to me, my identity within the LGBTQ+ community will have undoubtedly impacted my areas of interpretation and therefore impact the research outcomes.

However, I have ensured that I remained transparent with my positionality throughout the research process, alongside using reflection boxes and commentary throughout the thesis to ensure that my position and investment are evident to the reader. Rosenberg (2018) discussed the limitations of LGBTQ+ community members carrying out research within the community, identifying that knowledge may be assumed, and thereby key information may be missed. However, Rosenberg (2018) proposed that the risk can be alleviated through reflexive practice and support from other researchers alongside the continued exploration of the researcher's positionality and connection to the research. I utilised the use of research supervision as a space to examine my positionality and kept a research journal, as well as using The Listening Guide (Gilligan, 2015), where the first stage of analysis involves creating a reflexive account. Similar to reflections shared in Fletcher's (2022) research, I feel that my LGBTQ+ identity created a sense of connection with the participants.

6.12 Summary

My research supports and builds upon the existing research, which explores the experiences of online communities amongst the LGBTQ+ community. My research sought to explore how young adults who are LGBTQ+ experienced online communities when attending an educational setting. My understanding is that this is the first piece of research within the field of UK Educational Psychology to explore the experiences of online communities amongst the LGBTQ+ community. I believe the research has provided useful implications for the work of EPs and educational professionals and is in keeping with the emancipatory endeavours of the research project.

Implementing a phased approach to the research enabled a strong rapport between myself and the participants, ensuring that participants could self-protect and consider the stories they felt comfortable and safe sharing with me (Aldridge, 2016). In addition, using Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1995) ecological systems theory to frame the discussion supported the consideration of understanding young people in the context of their environment. The links to the environmental context of young people were supportive in ensuring the research did not perpetuate common

narratives of deficit, particularly when exploring the challenges, participants presented in their experiences of online communities.

The research did not aim to suggest a homogenous experience the participants but sought to find commonalities across the narratives and within the voices shared to inform relevant implications for professional practice for EPs and education professionals. My research has subsequently identified a range of implications relating to the common themes identified in the discussion, informed by the participant's narratives and current literature. For example, ensuring young people who are LGBTQ+ are consulted and included in discussions around supporting LGBTQ+ communities and shifting school cultures. Collaborative practice will ensure that professionals are well informed and that support is appropriate and effective.

Voices of belonging, acceptance and support concerning online communities were evident across all the narratives. I identified common themes across of '*Description or Prescription, The Tension of Labels*', '*Another's Narrative and Me*', '*Finding Home; Refuge and Belonging in Online Spaces*' and '*Pride, Prejudice and Acts of Resistance*'. Whilst all three participants sought community online due to a lack of support or acknowledgement in their school settings, the importance and value they now place on their online community is enormous. All three participants experienced significant improvement in their lives through engagement in online communities and identified their hopes for the future and LGBTQ+ youth.

6.13 Finding Hope

Dunsmuir and Kratochwill (2013) suggested that EPs can be agents of change by applying psychological knowledge to facilitate meaningful action. Cox and Lumsdon (2020) explored the suggestion further and debated that in addition to the capacity to facilitate change, EPs are also agents of hope, typically working in environments and settings where individuals are searching for glimmers of hope. I think the capacity for EPs to present optimism is a powerful and important aspect of supporting CYP who are LGBTQ+. All the participants' narratives discussed the impact of their online communities, the hope their communities provided them with, their futures, their

access to education, and their aspirations for other LGBTQ+ young people. Both Static and Glaze discussed their wishes for LGBTQ+ young people to experience greater understanding and acceptance. My aim is that through disseminating my research findings, there will be continued hope that change and improvement can occur.

My dissemination plan includes creating a snakes and ladders game to show the narratives of each participant, with the snakes displaying the challenges of their online communities and the ladders displaying the positives. Dierckz et al. (2022) highlighted that creative approaches to dissemination can empower research participants and provide clear and visual access to key findings. Through centralising the participant's narratives, I want to ensure that the positives will be considered as equally important as the challenges, reinforcing the positive focus that the participants wanted to communicate. In addition, presenting a visual approach to the findings may highlight where change would be helpful for CYP, conveying what needs to change in an achievable manner whilst enabling professionals to feel empowered to take steps to change. All of which are principles of Synder's (1994) Hope Theory, whereby goals, ways to achieve the goals and agency to take steps enable hopeful thinking among individuals.

Alex, Glaze and Static's narratives have considerably impacted me, and I will endeavour to support young people to feel accepted and have a secure sense of belonging in their educational settings in my professional practice as a result. I am optimistic that making small changes in my practice, as explored in the implications section, will enable greater acceptance and inclusion for LGBTQ+ young people. I share Static's hope for change because *"it shouldn't be that Queer people don't feel that there is a place for them in er in the world"* (H, 351-352).

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Appendices

Appendix A: Summary Thesis

“They’re the reason I am still here. Alive”: Experiences of online communities amongst young adults who are LGBTQ+.

Carys Todd

Supervised by Dr Penny Fogg

Introduction


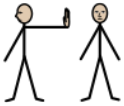

My research is about the experiences of young people who are LGBTQ+. To ensure that my research is not **biased**, I want to be clear about my interest in the topic.

My previous studies and work have included working with young people who are LGBTQ+, which showed me the positive difference good support can have. However, it also showed me that school can be really difficult for young people who are LGBTQ+.

As I am bi, I also have experience of being LGBTQ+ at school, although my time there was positive. I was nervous about writing I am bi in the research, as there is often a **stigma** about bisexuality. However, I spoke to an **EP** who shared their experiences, which made me feel positive about including it in the research write-up.

As I have experience in the topic, I understand that I will bring my own **bias** to the research. To ensure that I focused on the research study and did not just write up my opinions, I kept a diary when completing the research. I regularly spoke to my supervisor, colleagues and friends.

At the end of each section is a table defining some key terms that have been highlighted in bold.

Key Terms		
Bias		Unfair or one-sided
Stigma		Negative and often unfair beliefs that society or a group of people have about something.
EP		Educational Psychologist

Literature Review

A literature review tries to discuss research and writing that already exists about the research topic. The surname and dates in brackets show who said that information and when. For example (Todd, 2023) would show that Todd said it in 2023.

Research is often written by more than one person. When more than 2 people have written it, I have shown this by writing 'and others' after the first name e.g. Todd and others, 2023.

Definitions

I wanted to respect the words that people use to describe themselves. But I also needed to make sure that anyone reading my thesis knew what I meant when using key terms like LGBTQ+.

LGBTQ+: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, Queer/questioning (Stonewall, 2023). The plus sign represents all gender identities and sexual orientations. (Koenig, 2019)

Online Communities: Bruckman (2006) said that finding a specific definition is not important as long as we know that online communities are defined by their members. Preece and Maloney-Krichamar (2005) agreed and said online communities are where people can access support from others.

I have used the Cambridge Dictionary definition, "a group of people who use a particular internet service or belong to a particular group on the internet" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022).

Theory

Many theories consider how the LGBTQ+ community should be researched or be better supported. Queer theory has **advocated** for the LGBTQ+ community to have more rights and freedom for a very long time. The theory says that fixed groups, such as males and females, are unhelpful. The fixed groups mean that even when more groups are made, people who don't fit into them are **marginalised** (Jagose, 1996). As I am cisgender, I needed to think carefully about how I researched and discussed the trans community.

Green (2004) argued that Queer theory still talks about gender as a **binary**, but transgender theory tries to **empower** the transgender community (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010). I have used Queer and transgender theories in my research to help me be critical and make sure that the research is in the best interests of the LGBTQ+ community.

Being LGBTQ+ in the UK

Most of the research showed that LGBTQ+ individuals face a lot of discrimination in the UK. When people try to proudly show their identity, which is different to straight cis people, they can be discriminated against even more (Bain & Podmore, 2020). McMahon's (2022) research found that the UK encourages the idea that being straight is the default and the ideal, often called **heteronormative**, which can lead to more homophobia.

The UK has introduced more legal rights for LGBT people, such as same-sex marriage (2013). In addition, the Equality Act (2010) has made it illegal to discriminate against someone because of their gender or sexuality.

UK Schools

Johnson's (2023) research showed that even teachers who wanted to support LGBTQ+ students acted in a way that reinforced being straight is ideal or normal (heteronormative). Lots of research said that heteronormative places have high levels of LGBTQ+ bullying.

The research focuses on the negative experiences of school for LGBTQ+ young people. Negative experiences have been linked to struggles with mental health and feeling isolated.

What helps LGBTQ+ young people?

It helps when research does not only talk about LGBTQ+ groups as being at risk of harm but also looks at positive experiences (Allen, 2019).

Access to safe and supportive schools with positive friendship groups was very helpful (Wilson & Cariola, 2020). McDermott (2015) said online friends and groups were very important for LGBTQ+ young people.

Formby (2015) said including LGBTQ+ in all subjects at school will support the acceptance of all young people. Elia and Eliason (2010) did say this can be difficult as students can be scared to ask questions. But it can be empowering for young people

LGBT+ experiences online

Hubbard (2020) wrote about the anti-LGBTQ+ hate that young people often experience online, which can lead to isolation.

Research by Hiebert and Kortess-Miller (2021) showed that young people created online communities through TikTok by following certain hashtags and influencers. However, Winestone and others (2021) said that young people feel adults only talk about the dangers online and do not listen to the positives of online communities and social media.

Through my reading, I found very little research that looked at the positives of online communities that was qualitative. Qualitative research looks at words and language rather than numbers and figures. As qualitative research helps get a deeper understanding of the topic and lets the researcher clarify what the participant has said, I thought this was the best approach.

Educational Psychologists (EPs)

My research needs to be relevant to EPs, as this thesis is part of my training to become an EP. A theory called Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) shows that it is important that young people feel they belong before they can try to complete their learning. EPs can help schools make sure they can support all young people. EPs work in lots of different ways with young people, schools and families. So they can be flexible in their work to support LGBTQ+ young people. EPs need more

understanding of how to help LGBTQ+ young people and what might be important to them; this research hopes to do that.

Summary

Wilson and Cariola (2020) and Higa and others (2014) spoke about the need for research looking at the role of online spaces for young people, focusing on the positive factors.

There is a lack of research in the UK looking at the experiences of online communities amongst LGBTQ+. I found 2 relevant studies, Taylor and others (2014) and Downing (2013).








Downing's research focused on dating apps and sexual relationships, with little reference to educational settings. Taylor and others (2014) looked at the experiences of queer Christian youth on Facebook; their participants were 17-34.

Over the 10 years since their studies, there have been lots of cultural changes in the UK, including the popularity of social media sites. Facebook, for example, is no longer popular among young people.

Research Question

In my research, I tried to answer this question:

How do young adults who are LGBTQ+ experience online communities when they attend an educational setting?

Key Terms	
Advocate	 A person who supports someone else.
Binary	 Something with 2 parts (e.g. Male & Female)
Discriminate	 Unfair differences in how people are treated
Empower	 Making someone feel more confident in taking control
Heteronormative	 Assumption that being straight is the default sexual orientation
Marginalised	 Treating people like they are insignificant or lesser
Recruit	 Finding suitable people to take part in the research

Methodology

Research **philosophy** is about the key ideas that direct how to carry out research and how we think about the research.

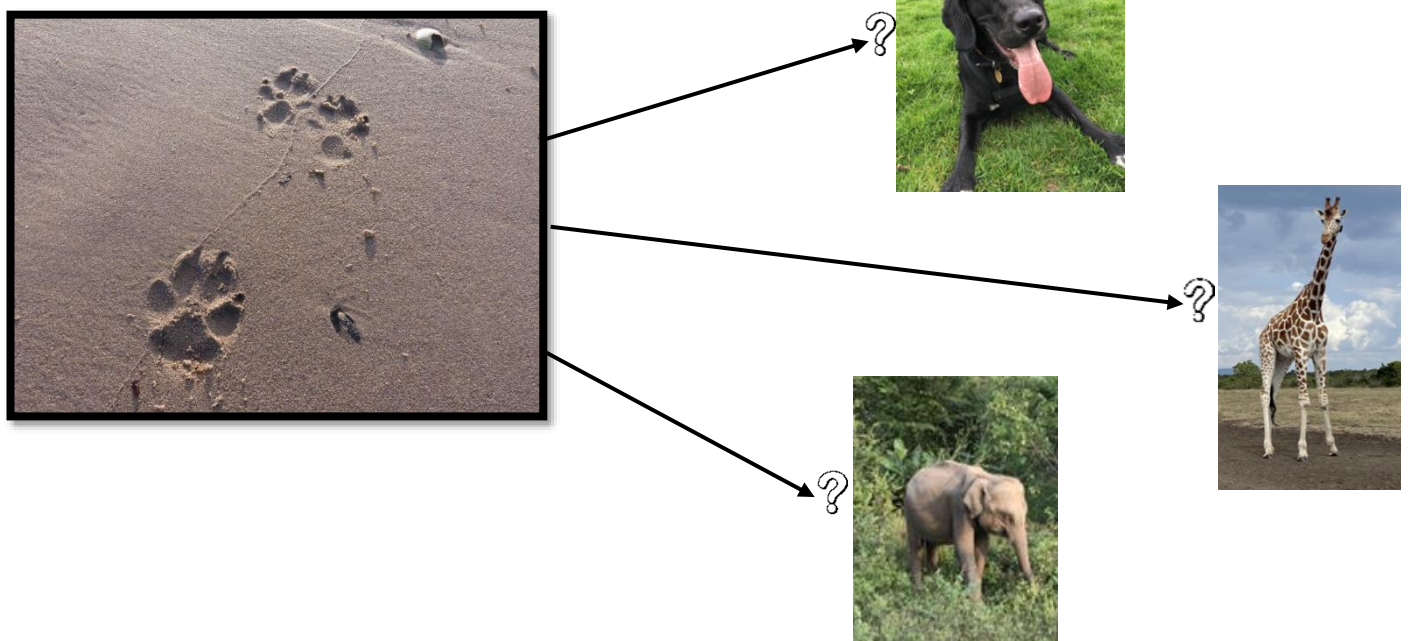
A big part of research philosophy is considering what we mean by 'knowledge' and knowing things. It is important to state the research philosophy because it shows how the research can be understood.

Ontology is how we understand what the world is; for example, one ontology may say everyone understands the world differently based on their experiences. Another may say there is one fixed view of the world, where people's experiences don't change that.

Epistemology is how we can find things out; for example, there are things we can know as real and facts that can be measured. Another epistemology may say knowing things is based on individual experiences and environments, so there is no one truth or fact, but lots of different ones.

My research uses a critical realist ontology and epistemology. Critical realism says that there are things that are true and real. But people's experiences impact their understanding of the world, so we cannot completely see or understand a shared view. It can be helpful to think about critical realism as a footprint.

We know that the footprint represents something, we can **infer** and use our knowledge to guess what it is, but we cannot know for sure. Our prior experiences may impact our best guesses of what it is.







Narrative Approach

Narrative research looks at how people make sense of their experiences. The researcher considers the participant's environment when exploring their story. Some narrative approaches are interested in the different perspectives and feelings shared in the narratives, referred to as voices (Loots and others, 2013). I thought exploring how experiences are discussed and possible tensions in how a participant describes their identity offline and online would be interesting.

Narrative approaches support the researcher in bringing their experiences to the research; this is called intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity can mean the researcher understands the stories shared better. Riessman (2008) says that narratives are made jointly between the researcher and the participant.

Emancipatory Aim

Emancipatory research aims to create information that will be helpful to people that have been marginalised (Noel, 2016). An important part of emancipatory research is making sure that the research benefits the participants and that they are included throughout the research. Emancipatory research aims for **social change** and **justice**.

Key Terms		
Philosophy		A set of systems or beliefs. Exploring topics relating to the meaning of life.
Infer		Conclude something by using logic.
Social change		Changes in society that impact cultural and social attitudes. Social change happens over time and has a long-term impact.
Justice		Fair treatment or outcomes from a decision.

Research Plan

Participants

The research said there is not a specific number of participants needed. I chose The Listening Guide to analyse the research, which is very in-depth, so I felt a small group would be best.

I aimed to recruit 3 participants who were:

- 18-21 years old
- LGBTQ+
- Attending a school setting or has attended one in the last 5 years.

I had a **pilot study** with an LGBTQ+ support worker to determine if my questions were appropriate before I began interviewing participants.

Recruitment

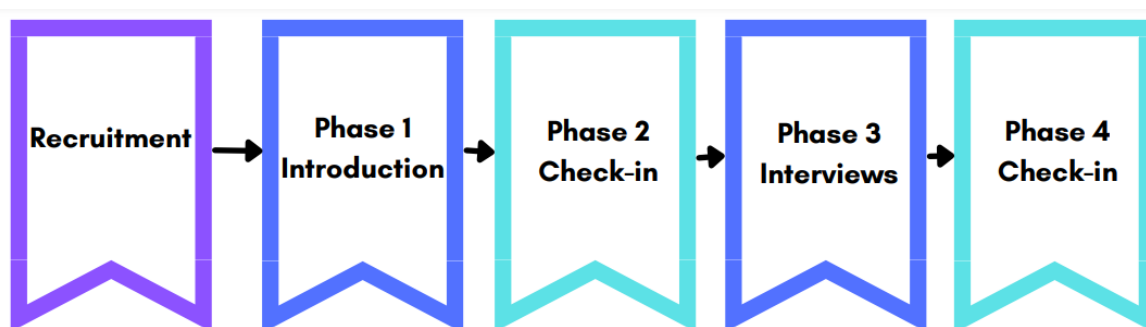
I made a research poster to invite participants, and it was shared with LGBTQ+ youth groups in the area I work. My pilot participant had a connection to LGBTQ+ groups in the South East of England, and shared the research poster there

Research Participants

I had 3 participants, all were from the South East of England.

Informed Consent

I used the following approach:



Informed consent ensures that participants want to take part and understand what taking part will include. Informed consent includes participants knowing they can stop at any point.

I made information sheets about the research, and all participants signed consent forms which I went through with them. Next, I had an introduction session to make sure participants felt comfortable with me and could decide what stories they shared. The introduction included a creative activity, looking at identities online and offline to help participants think about stories they may want to share in the interview.

I got verbal consent before each stage of the research.

Wellbeing

As it can be difficult to talk about experiences, and the research showed that LGBTQ+ young people often have difficult experiences online, I needed to think about the wellbeing of the participants.

I used a traffic light card, so participants could show if they wanted to stop the interview without having to speak, pointing at the red to stop or yellow to pause. If participants became very upset, I also had a process to follow, so I knew how to respond.



After the interviews, I gave all participants the contact details of relevant support services they may have wanted to contact.

Narrative Interviews

Hyden (2013) said building a relationship between the researcher and participants is an important aspect of narrative approaches.

I collected spoken narratives from face-to-face (in-person) interviews, which I **audio-recorded**. Carrying out interviews meant I could ask the participant to clarify if I didn't understand something.

The interviews were informal and unstructured to ensure the participants had control over what they shared with me (Mischler, 1991). The pilot participant thought it was important to summarise the interview to recognise the possible positive experiences. Therefore, I made **graphic** visuals to summarise the key themes discussed in the interviews.

I used questions like "How did that feel?" and "How was that experience?" to follow up on what participants said and repeated key phrases. Sometimes my questions or comments did change the direction of the interview, which shows that the interviews were **collaborative** (Riessman, 2008).

Quality in Research

Lincoln and Guba (1985) have made quality principles often used in qualitative research. These include trustworthiness, dependability and transferability.

Trustworthiness

Building relationships with the participants was an important part of trustworthiness. The introductory meeting was important for building rapport, so participants felt comfortable sharing their stories.

Sharing my LGBTQ+ identity with the participants helped to lessen the power imbalance between myself as the researcher and the participants (Riley and others,

2003). As well as providing a visual summary of the interviews, I offered to share the interview transcripts with all participants so they could check them.

Dependability

I made sure that all the stages of the research were made clear. I also used a research diary to note my reflections and thoughts.

Transferability

As narrative approaches gather unique stories, I cannot **generalise** the data. However, the narratives have provided useful suggestions to improve professional practice.

Analysis: The Listening Guide

The Listening Guide (Gilligan, 2015) is the method I chose to analyse the data. Woodcock (2016) spoke about using the Listening Guide being used to listen to people who have been marginalised.

The Listening guide focuses on the relationship between the participant and the research. It acknowledges the researcher's influence in the interviews. My approach to the interview was slightly different in each interview. There is no fixed structure of how to use the listening guide, but listening to the interviews lots of times is needed.

Gilligan (2015) spoke about 4 stages of the analysis, I followed them all.

Stage 1, listening for the plot

The first stage is about noticing how I felt and thought when I first listened to the interviews. When I analysed the interviews, I highlighted stage 1 in **green**, which were keywords that I thought were important or repeated

Stage 2 – Making I Poems

Stage 2 is finding all the first-person pronouns to try and understand how the participants make sense of themselves.





I used Gilligan and Eddy's (2017) guide to creating the I poems, highlighting every I phrase in **yellow**. I then placed all the phrases together, each on a different line.

Stage 3 – Listening for the different voices

Stage 3 is listening for the different ways the participant talks about their experiences and perspectives (voices). It includes where the voices are very different and when they are similar. I highlighted each of these voices in **pink**.

Stage 4 – Creating an analysis

The final stage is creating a written analysis with aspects from the previous 3 steps.

Key Terms		
Pilot Study	1 st	A small study to test the methods
Audio-recorded		A recording of spoken conversation
Generalise		Make a broad or general statement. When something widely applicable
Graphic		Visual art or drawing
Collaborative		Working jointly

Findings

I have discussed each story separately to highlight that the participants' experiences differ. I have identified key topics in each of the narratives, which I introduce through a key quote and then explore the area a little more.

Static's Story

Static is 20 years old and uses he/they pronouns. Static is transgender and queer.

Static has diagnoses of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). They work in an office in the same city where he attended school and college. Static described having a close group of friends at school and how online communities were very positive for him during an 18-month absence from school. Static shared that online communities give him a sense of **escapism** and support. They also discussed the challenge of being physically distant from his online friends. Static is now an active member of the LGBTQ+ community and is a queer parent to younger LGBTQ+ people.

“A couple of us actually came out before things were entirely (.) legal in the UK, so it wasn't something we would share around”

Static spoke about the impact of UK laws on other people's understanding of his gender and sexual identity. A lack of control was a strong voice that could be heard in the narrative, with things being done to Static. Static explained this as a consequence of same-sex marriage not yet being legal.

The following I poem shows how Static viewed themselves regarding the **legislation**.

*I came out it was just before marriage became legal
I became target
I think
I probably could have chosen a better timing
I got
I didn't see a positive
I was pulled into a headteacher office
I was brought into the head of years
(If) I was date to anyone
I would be put in isolation
I first came out
I took a year and half out*

Static spoke about being treated differently from his peers “I would be put in isolation because it was frowned upon to be doing any of that sort of thing”. Static's tutor told them that “it wasn't to be shown”, which highlights a sense of secrecy needed in Static's identity at school.

In P.E, Static wasn't allowed to use the changing room; they described that this was because teachers thought he was a "danger to other students". Static had to get changed in a busy staff room. This made me sad and angry, as I didn't feel that Static was being safeguarded at school.

Static discussed finding an "incredible support network" online during secondary school.

"For me personally it was very escapism"

Static found that online communities allowed him to escape difficulties in his life. Static considered escapism as a coping strategy

*(If) I'm upset
I can go okay
I want to sort this
I can go and hide
I learnt to escape*

Static could find the support he needed online, for example playing "video games until 4am". Static said it can be difficult when everyone wants different support online. It has meant that Static sometimes misjudges what support others may want., Static shared the worry and stress of being geographically far away from online friends.

"Once they do get enough signatures the government do have to acknowledge them"

Static looks out for resources and support that be helpful for other LGBTQ+ people, especially their younger brother. Static takes an active role in signing petitions and attending marches. Static's narrative includes a voice of change and transition when he talks about becoming more actively involved in the LGBTQ+ community after college.

"If a kid was to identify as LGBT from a young age, oh no no, no you're too young to know"

Static described the differences between the attitudes towards straight students and LGBTQ+ students. A strong voice of injustice was heard in the narrative. Static then discussed that LGBTQ+ people continue to be **sexualised** in the UK. Static described the unfairness and discomfort of people focusing on who they are romantically or sexually attracted to. Static worried coming out to people would indicate he was romantically or sexually interested in them.

I found that difficult

*I never wanted
I was queer
I would fancy them
(if) I spoke
I sadly*

Static explained that people interested in more than one gender are discriminated against. They are considered to be “greedy” or want to have “group time”.

“I was diagnosed with both autism and ADHD, so my brain already works different”

Static had initially said that his brain worked differently “from the norm” but made a correction to “**neurotypical** brains”. I wondered if Static was uncomfortable with the idea of normal.

Static then spoke about being a man and masculinity. Static changed their name in response to ongoing transphobic hate because of assumptions people had about their “hyper-masculine” name.

Static appeared to separate himself from the “ideal” man. I wondered if this was a result of the abuse he received. Static discussed their supportive work colleagues but said they often did not understand his experiences. However, support from friends in his online community who understand the incidents’ impact was helpful.

Static then emphasised that his online support was sometimes his only source of support, stating that without it, he “wouldn’t be here”.

“They’re the reason I am still here. Alive”

A voice of happiness and improvement could be heard in Static’s narrative.

*I can
I went back to school
I am still here
I am glad
I continued education*

I feel this highlights the hope and value Static places on his online community.

Alex’s Story

Alex is 19 years old, uses he/him pronouns and is a bisexual, cisgender male. Alex attends an LGBTQ+ pride group at college and lives in the South East of England. Alex attends college and works part-time.

Alex spoke about resistance to online spaces, despite finding them useful. Alex enjoyed school but struggled to understand his sexual orientation and turned to online spaces for support. Alex's dad is Muslim and of Irian heritage. Alex spoke about the possible tensions between the LGBTQ+ community and Islam.

Alex asked for a second interview as he felt he had been "harsh about gay people" and wanted to clarify his views.

"I wanted to be normal I hated everything about (.) myself"

Alex described transitioning from having "loved school" to feeling different when friends "were getting girlfriends". Voices of hatred and shame can be heard when Alex "started to like guys".

*I felt dirty and wrong
I wanted to be normal
I hated everything
I didn't know
I was feeling
I knew
I couldn't feel like this*

A voice of jealousy could be heard, "I was like jealous", yet not feeling like he had control, but didn't feel able to show his possible interest in "lads".

Alex spoke about his want for positive role models. However, a teacher sharing they were gay and then receiving homophobic abuse emphasised to Alex that he needed to hide his sexual orientation from others.

"I was living two different lives"

Alex searched for information and understanding online, initially on Reddit. Alex felt there was a difference in his life online and at school. However, he thought that "there wasn't a space for me, Alex, no one wanted me".

Alex initially felt that online spaces were like a "guilty pleasure."

*I kept telling myself like delete it
I kept going
I just wanted somewhere
I could find out more
I am
I am quite all or nothing
I think
I was just like*

I just began to feel safer

A voice of sadness was heard in Alex's discussion of the differences in his identities online and offline, sharing that he had no one he trusted.

Alex spoke about how he wanted to build relationships with others but struggled to find similarities with other LGBTQ+ people online.

“It was just draining always being told off”

A voice of **policing** was heard in Alex's narrative about the expectations of others in online spaces.

*I swear to you
I guessed their pronouns
I just thought
I'm trying to be friendly
(if) I'd got it wrong
I
I am not transphobic*

Alex felt others were quick to call out mistakes, “everyone getting lairy [meaning: rude or mouthy]”, which led to Alex reducing his time online.

Alex then met a boyfriend online and described feeling like himself for the first time. However, Alex did not want to tell others about his relationship and received criticism from others online.

“The teacher just said ‘stop being a squinny’ [meaning someone who moans or complains a lot]”.

Voices of hate and hardship were heard after Alex's ex-boyfriend shared **explicit** pictures with people at Alex's school without his consent. Alex spoke about a conflict in wanting support but being scared about other people finding out he was “seeing a lad”.

*I had no one to tell
I knew what was coming
I wanted to die
I think
I wish there was someone
I could of erm talked to*

Alex then experienced ongoing homophobic abuse about the explicit pictures outing him. Alex received no support from the teaching staff, leading him to find support and friendship online.

I actually

*I relied on these people
I think
I erm
I could be me
I didn't care
I could be me*

“My dad is my hero (.) but he hates er gay people”

Alex spoke about not being who his dad wants him to be.

*I always wished
I could be who my dad wants me to be
I have disappointed him
I said like my dad can't know*

A voice of curiosity can be heard when Alex talks about his dad's faith. Alex's difficulty sharing his sexual identity with his dad led him to find specific online groups.

“There was a place for me”

Throughout his narrative, Alex spoke about not feeling like he belonged. Alex faced rejection from queer spaces when in a relationship with someone of the opposite gender. He also faced rejection from school when in a relationship with someone of the same gender.

Alex spoke about his online community being “everything” to him, where a voice of acceptance can be heard. Alex's online activity includes influencers he has found through Instagram and TikTok. A voice of belonging and acceptance was heard, with Alex feeling “there was a place for me” in the online spaces created by Queer Muslim content creators.

Alex did not experience acceptance from his family. He felt unable to come out to his dad, and his mum shared her relief that it was “a phase with the boys”. The connections from online communities are essential to Alex.

Glaze's Story

Glaze is 20 years old, uses he/they pronouns and is transmasculine and bisexual. Glaze works at a call centre in Southeast England, where he attended secondary school and college.

Glaze describes the positive impact of finding a label to define his identity. However, Glaze also spoke about the high level of transphobia online, so he only engages with

a few online platforms. Glaze also described other users online as “policing” the labels members use but highlighted that online communities are very important to him.

“Oh, so there’s a word bisexual’ and I was like ‘Oh, that makes sense”

There is a strong voice of discovery in Glaze’s narrative. Online spaces provided them with “the words to describe myself”

*I knew gay and straight
I was in sort of secondary school
I sort of started sort of exploring*

A voice of comfort can be heard in Glaze, finding the words to best describe their identity. Glaze suggests the ability to explore their identity was unique to online space. In addition, the anonymity of online spaces was important in Glaze exploring their identity without the fear of being outed.

“Then he sent me like, (.) porn accounts and stuff”

*I
I came out as bi
I wasn’t out to everyone
I thought
I could trust
I didn’t want to see that*

A voice that lacks control is present when Glaze shared they are bisexual and was sent **unsolicited** porn accounts from a friend they thought they could trust. Glaze also experienced other people making assumptions about bisexuality “my whole identity was being considered solely on what on sexual interests”.

Despite wanting support from teachers, Glaze did not ask for help out of fear they would be discriminated against, so he “tried to deal with it alone”.

“It’s almost almost policing other people’s identities”

A recurring story in Glaze’s narrative was the policing of people’s identities, describing that it feels like you have “tick every box in a checklist” to use specific labels. For example, Glaze spoke about wearing clothing such as skirts leading to people questioning if he is trans, feeling that if they were a cis man, that wouldn’t happen.

“I am offending people by just existing”

Glaze spoke about a change that happened online. At first, they found acceptance; however, now there is a lot of transphobia. As a result of the online hate, Glaze shared that people fear the trans community.

A voice of loss was heard in Glaze's narrative of online hate. Glaze was a big Harry Potter fan but no longer wants to associate with it after the author, J.K. Rowling, spoke online about their anti-trans views.

"I'm able to curate again again that community for myself"

As a result of the online hate, Glaze stopped using most online sites to protect themselves.

*I was just seeing so much t-transphobia online
I couldn't get away
I was just like
I'm just gonna get rid
I'm still active
I find it a lot easier
I can block
I can blacklist certain words
I've stuck to it*

Glaze tries to protect himself by blocking certain words and terms. They are careful not to create an **echo chamber**, so they research new topics so he can make their own decision.





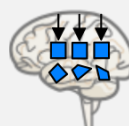


"This is where I feel safe"

A voice of acceptance could be heard in Glaze's story "there are people who will accept me". Glaze's mum was "very against" him talking to people online. Glaze felt he needed to be online because he wasn't getting accepted anywhere else.

*I
I this was the only space
I did feel safe
I do understand
I was
I got older
I was like
I am old enough
I'm not going
I
I understand
I was just like*

*I'm not getting that anywhere
/*
I need to get it somewhere

Glaze shared that having support from their online community made them see they weren't "weird or broken". Although, he felt that it would have been helpful for college to have understood the importance of online communities for him. Glaze experienced difficulties at college that resulted in "patchy" attendance, but he knew he wasn't alone because of their online community.

Key Terms		
Escapism		Finding distraction and relief from difficult things
Legislation		Laws
Explicit		Showing something that contains adult content (e.g. a sexual image or swearing)
Sexualised		Seeing someone sexually or perceiving a situation or person in a sexual way.
Neurotypical		Someone whose brain functions in a similar way to others
Unsolicited		Something that is done without consent / not asked for
Echo Chamber		A space where someone only hears views or beliefs that are the same as their own, so their opinions are reinforced.

Discussion

I have found 4 common themes across the narratives. These were about; Labels, **Perceptions**, Belonging and Stigma.

Labels

All the participants spoke about using specific terms to describe their identity and how they changed the terms they used over time. Attention was made to the positive impact of specific labels on the participants to understand their identity, which Kosciw and others (2015) also found. My research also drew attention to the **policing** of labels and terminology in online spaces. Formby (2022) suggested policing in online communities may create a sense of safety and **cohesion**.

What can professionals learn?

School Settings: Staff should be open to discussing and learning about LGBTQ+ terminology, including being open to corrections if teachers use the wrong pronouns or language. Staff should try to build strong relationships with students and consider how to respond to LGBTQ+ hate at a whole-school level.

EP's: My research indicated the positive impact when care is taken to respect the language young people use. Making sure that EPs use the correct language in conversations and written reports are important. EPs can support schools to make sure they are doing the same.

Perspectives

The participants spoke about tensions between how they wanted to be seen and how they were seen by others. Glaze spoke about creating their own internet experience to limit their exposure to transphobic hate. Jacobsen and others (2022) found that transgender young people often created a space online that ignored outsiders and created a **haven** prioritising transgender matters. However, this can mean that young people only access information from one source, which may not always be reliable or accurate.

The teaching staff had a big role in how the participants viewed themselves. They all spoke about a lack of support or acceptance. Alex also described the impact homophobic abuse towards a teacher had on his identity and the lack of support the teacher received. Saxey (2020) said LGBTQ+ teachers are often made to take the lead in LGBTQ+ matters in schools, or they are made to feel coming out is bad practice.

What can professionals learn?

School Settings: Staff should consider teaching critical thinking skills. Kong (2015) researched the effectiveness of essential learning skills and spoke about the importance of including critical thinking towards online spaces in everyday learning.

The Department for Education (2019) has included online safety in the Relationship and Sex Education curriculum.

EPs: Support schools to think about the role they are putting LGBTQ+ staff in to ensure that there is not an emotional **burden** placed on these teachers.

EPs can also support school-level training and support to understand how staff can support students. The training can be in partnership with students. Johnson (2022) highlighted the need for ongoing training and development for teachers on LGBTQ+ matters.

Belonging

All the participants discussed wanting to find a sense of belonging after experiencing negative incidents at school and receiving no support.

They all spoke about the significant positive impact and feeling that there was a place for them online. Pasciar and others (2022) described queer safe spaces as refuges from harm.

The fear of rejection from teaching staff led to Glaze and Alex not asking for help despite wanting to. Rostosky and others (2021) said that LGBTQ+ young people experience **hypervigilance** in response to rejection to try and gain a sense of control

Family was a recurring theme, with all the participants describing the difficulties in coming out to their families. Hiebert and Kortess-Miller (2021) found that LGBTQ+ youth gained acceptance and belonging through communities on TikTok after being rejected by family members because of their LGBTQ+ identities.

What can professionals learn?

School Settings: Schools need to consider how to support community and belonging for everyone. As young people are the experts in their experiences, working with them is important. Formby (2015) recommended including LGBTQ+ topics in all areas of learning helps to increase acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community.

Staff should consider appropriate alternatives to gender-neutral facilities so that feelings of difference or isolation are not **exacerbated**. Students must not feel they are being punished for their gender or sexual identities.

EP's: EPs should consider how online communities can be utilised. EPs should consider how online communities could be used to support young people struggling to attend an educational setting.

EPs should be cautious in reporting the views of families, as their views may further strain an already strained relationship if the views of a young person and family differ. EPs need to consider how they can effectively gather the views of young people who are LGBTQ+ and check they are happy for their views to be shared with others.

Stigma

The participants described feelings of pride and acceptance from their online communities but also felt shame and stigma from others through accessing support online.

Finlay-Jones and others (2021) suggested that LGBTQ+ people internalise stigma to cope. Renold (2001) highlighted that young people spend a long time at school, so the attitudes they hear will likely impact how they view themselves and their support.

The participants spoke about resistance to stigma by limiting the online platforms they use and engaging in LGBTQ+ activism. Erlick (2018) talked about the need for online activism among young transgender people to create mentally and physically safe places online. All the participants experienced resistance, belonging and community very differently.

What can professionals learn?

School Settings: Staff need to acknowledge the positive impact of online communities, for example, not responding to conversations about online friends with reminders of online harm.

Schools should consider whole school change for long-lasting change. It may be helpful to use the interests of LGBTQ+ students engaging in social action to show collective action and acceptance.

EPs: EPs can support the school in building relationship-based behaviour policies. The policies should clearly state that the school is against all forms of discrimination towards the LGBTQ+ community (Allen and others, 2022).

Limitations

I wanted to make sure participants didn't need parental consent so they did not need to be 'out'. Therefore, participants needed to be 18 or over. However, as 2 of the participants no longer attended educational settings and reflected on their experiences, schools have likely changed since they left.

The introduction meeting included a creative-based task where participants thought about the difference in their lives on and offline. The task was only to build relationships, which may be a limitation. Using creative approaches may have provided further information.

I had an active role in the interviews with my questions and comment. Therefore, I influenced the narratives shared. Different researchers are likely to have found different themes or focused on other areas because of the subjectivity of my research project.









Future Research

Research should expand on this thesis, firstly by adapting the participant selection and gathering the view of female members of the LGBTQ+ community as well as young people still in **compulsory** education.

Conclusion

My research supported and built on existing research, exploring the experiences of online communities among LGBTQ+ young adults. My research is the first in UK educational psychology to explore this topic. I think the research has found useful suggestions for EPs and school settings, which is in keeping with the emancipatory aims of the project.

Labels, Perceptions, Belonging and Stigma, were found as common themes throughout all the narratives. All 3 participants sought community online because of a lack of school support but now place enormous value on their online communities.

Key Terms		
Perception		The way something is understood or interpreted
Policing		Keeping order and regulating
Cohesion		When something comes together to make sense
Haven		A place of safety
Burden		Something that is very difficult to do or to deal with
Hypervigilance		Constantly accessing potential threats around you
Exacerbated		Making something worse
Compulsory		Something that has to be done that is required by a rule or law

Appendix B: Ethical Approval Confirmation Letter



Downloaded: 06/04/2023

Approved: 21/07/2022

Carys Todd
 Registration number: 200112644
 School of Education
 Programme: Doctorate of Child and Education Psychology

Dear Carys

PROJECT TITLE: Exploring the experiences of online communities amongst young adult's who are LGBTQ+: A Narrative Inquiry.

APPLICATION: Reference Number 046976

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 21/07/2022 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 046976 (form submission date: 30/06/2022); (expected project end date: 16/08/2023).
- Participant information sheet 1106263 version 2 (17/05/2022).
- Participant information sheet 1109436 version 1 (30/06/2022).
- Participant consent form 1106262 version 2 (17/05/2022).
- Participant consent form 1109438 version 1 (30/06/2022).

If during the course of the project you need to [deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation](#) please inform me since written approval will be required.

Your responsibilities in delivering this research project are set out at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely

Anna Weighall
 Ethics Administrator
 School of Education

Please note the following responsibilities of the researcher in delivering the research project:

- The project must abide by the University's Research Ethics Policy: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/research-services/ethics-integrity/policy>
- The project must abide by the University's Good Research & Innovation Practices Policy: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.671066!/file/GRIPPpolicy.pdf
- The researcher must inform their supervisor (in the case of a student) or Ethics Administrator (in the case of a member of staff) of any significant changes to the project or the approved documentation.
- The researcher must comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.
- The researcher is responsible for effectively managing the data collected both during and after the end of the project in line with best practice, and any relevant legislative, regulatory or contractual requirements.

Appendix C: Research Invitation Poster



Research Project

WHAT'S INVOLVED?

If you wanted to take part in the research, there are 4 stages.

- 1 Introduction:** A chance to introduce ourselves and you can ask any questions about the research.
- 2 Check in:** I'll check that you'd still like to take part, if you do we will arrange the interview.
- 3 Interview:** It will take around 40 minutes and I'll ask you about your experiences online, the positives and negatives.
- 4 Check-in:** After the interview, I'll share my analysis with you.

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

The study is about young adults who are LGBTQ+ and their experiences of community online.

WHO AM I?

I'm Carys, a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Sheffield



WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?

Anyone who:

- Is aged between 18 - 21
- Identifies as LGBTQ+
- Has attended a school or college setting in the last 5 years or who is currently attending a school or college setting.

INTERESTED OR WANT MORE INFORMATION?

Scan the QR Code to register your interest or for any further information.

Carys Todd (she/her) - Trainee Educational Psychologist
Email - ctodd1@sheffield.ac.uk



Appendix D: Participant Information Sheet



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

*Exploring the experiences of online communities amongst young adults who are LGBTQ+:
A Narrative Inquiry*

Hello, I'm Carys and I'm training to be an Educational Psychologist at the University of Sheffield. As part of my training, I am carrying out some research about what online communities are like for young adults who are LGBTQ+ who attend school or college.

I would like to invite you to part in my research, but before you decide it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. I have tried to answer any questions that you might have in this letter so that you more information to make your decision. If you have any more questions or want further information about the research, please do not hesitate to get in touch. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

Carys



What is the project's purpose?

This research project is seeking to explore how young adults aged 18 – 21 who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning or identify through any gender identity or sexual orientation that is not specially covered through the acronym LGBTQ (hereby known as LGBTQ+) experienced online communities. The project aims to provide a space in which young adults who are LGBTQ+ can share their experiences of online communities, both positives and negatives. It is hoped that by hearing directly from individuals who are LGBTQ+, that educational professionals will have a better understanding of what online communities mean and how they can better support all students regardless of sexual or gender identity and put in place meaningful support.

The research is being carried out by Carys Todd, who is a Trainee Educational Psychologist. The research is being completed as part of a Doctor of Educational and Child Psychology (DEdCPsy).

Why have I been chosen?

- You have identified that you are LGBTQ+

- You attended an educational setting within the last five years or you currently attend an educational setting
- You are aged between 18 – 21.

This research project will be recruiting 3 participants in total.

What will happen if I take part?

An initial introductory meeting will be organised to allow you to discuss the project further with Carys (the researcher). The meeting will provide a chance to get to know the researcher better; there will be an option to carry out a creative activity. The activity is creating two t-shirts (through drawings or collages), one that represents your identity online and one that represents offline. The researcher will also participate in the activity. The meeting will be arranged at a time and place that suits you. The introductory meeting will be used as a getting to know you session and will not explore your experiences in depth. This will also allow you time to reflect on your feelings.

The researcher will then organise a phone call to check in and discuss if you are still happy to participate in the interview. If so the researcher and you will organise a date and time to carry out the interview.

Will there be an interview?

The interview will take place 1:1 face-to-face in a setting that is private and that you are comfortable in. If you would like a supportive friend or support worker to attend that is fine. The interview will start by the researcher asking you about your experiences of online communities when you were in an educational setting (school or college). The researcher will then ask you some follow up questions about your experiences online.

The interview will be audio-recorded, and the researcher will use this to make a transcription of what was said. The researcher will then look for themes that emerge from the interviews. The researcher will contact you once the data has been analysed (this is likely to be around November/December 2022).

Do I have to take part?

No, taking part in the research is entirely voluntary and it is up to you to decide whether to take part or not. If you do decide to take part, you will be able to keep a copy of this information sheet and you should indicate your agreement on the consent form. If you change your mind about taking part during the research, you can withdraw at any point by contacting the researcher. You will not need to provide any explanation about withdrawing. You can withdraw at any point until the information from the interview has been transcribed and anonymised (this is likely to be December 2022).

What are the possible advantages of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for participating in the project, it I hoped that it will be a chance for you to share your experiences and to contribute to a research project that aims to provide educational professionals with greater insight about the experiences of online communities amongst students who are LGBTQ+. The research has been designed to be enjoyable and led by you.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Participating in the research is not felt to have any serious disadvantages or risks. However, sometimes reflecting on experiences can be distressing or difficult to talk about. You will be provided with contact details for both the researcher and a range of external organisations who can provide support should you become distressed or upset. The interview will be a supportive space, you can take time out whenever you need or want to, skip any questions or stop the interview at any point. During the interview you will be given traffic light card that you can use to indicate how you feel throughout the interview. A green card indicates you feel OK, Orange you don't want to answer the questions and red you want to stop (either for a break or to withdraw).

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All information that is collected about you during the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be identifiable in any reports or publications.

All data (the interview recording, the interview transcripts) will be kept securely on a password protected Google drive only accessible by the researcher. Once the data is anonymised the research supervisor will also have access to it.

What will happen to the data collected?

The audio recording of the interview will only be used for transcription and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings. The interview recordings and transcriptions will be saved securely on a password protected Google Drive in separate secure folders. Once the audio recordings have been transcribed they will be destroyed.

What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?

According to data protection legalisation, I am required to inform you that the legal basis I am applying in order to process your person data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1) (e)). Further information can be found in the University's Privacy Notice:
<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privaxy/general>.

As I will be collecting some data that is defined in the legalisation as more sensitive, information about sexual orientation. I need to note that I am applying the following condition in law: that the use of your data is "necessary for scientific or historical research purposes".

Who is the Data Controller?

The University of Sheffield, Western Bank, Sheffield, S10 2TN will be the Data Controller for this study. The Data Controller ensures that your data is being collected and used properly.

Who is organising and funding the research?

The School of Education, University of Sheffield. Please note that by choosing to take part in this research, it will not create a legally binding agreement nor is it intended to create an employment relationship between you and the University of Sheffield.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via Sheffield University's School of Education ethical review procedure. The University's Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the university's Ethics Review Procedure across the University.

What is something goes wrong?

If you are concerned or worried that something has gone wrong, please contact the researcher or Dr Penny Fogg, the project supervisor. You can find these contact details at the end of this document. If you feel your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction you can contact the University of Sheffield's registrar and secretary to take your complaint further. Alternatively you can contact [REDACTED] Head of School for Education at the University of Education. Email: [REDACTED]

Contact for further information

Researcher:

Carys Todd

School of Education, Edgar Allen House, 241 Glossop Road, Sheffield, S10 2GW

Email: ctodd1@sheffield.ac.uk

Project Supervisor:

Dr Penny Fogg

School of Education, Edgar Allen House, 241 Glossop Road, Sheffield, S10 2GW

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

Alternative Contact:

[REDACTED] – University of Sheffield's Head of School for Education

School of Education, Edgar Allen House, 241 Glossop Road, Sheffield, S10 2GW

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

Appendix E : Participant Consent Form

Title: Exploring the experiences of online communities amongst young adults who are LGBTQ+: A Narrative Inquiry

Please tick the appropriate boxes	Yes	No
I have read and understood the project information sheet dated 11.05.2022 or the project has been fully explained to me. If you will answer No to this question please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.		
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.		
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include an introductory meeting and taking part in an interview that will be audio recorded.		
I understand that by choosing to participate as a volunteer in this research, this does not create a legally binding agreement nor is it intended to create an employment relationship with the University of Sheffield.		
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study before December 2022; I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.		
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.		
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.		
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.		

Name of participant	Signature	Date
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date

Contact for further information**Researcher:**

Carys Todd

School of Education, Edgar Allen House, 241 Glossop Road, Sheffield, S10 2GW

Email: ctodd1@sheffield.ac.uk

Project Supervisor:

Dr Penny Fogg

School of Education, Edgar Allen House, 241 Glossop Road, Sheffield, S10 2GW

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

Alternative Contact:

[REDACTED] – University of Sheffield's Head of School for Education

School of Education, Edgar Allen House, 241 Glossop Road, Sheffield, S10 2GW

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

Appendix F: Interview Distress Protocol

If the participant is distressed, upset or they are showing signs of upset or distress



The
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Participating in the research is not felt to have any serious disadvantages or risks. However, sometimes reflecting on our lives can be upsetting or distressing. If you feel upset or distressed throughout the research and would like further support you can contact the researcher:

	<p>Researcher Carys Todd (Trainee Educational Psychologist) Email: ctodd1@sheffield.ac.uk</p> <p>School of Education, Edgar Allen House, 241 Glossop Road, Sheffield, S10 2GW</p>
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Or you may prefer to access support through one of these organisations:

	<p>Provide service to support Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and trans people. https://lgbt.foundation/. They provide support groups, face to face counselling, a helpline, email and pop-in services and much more. Call 03453303030 or email info@lgbt.foundation for more information.</p>
	<p>Get advice about how to support your mental health. https://youngminds.org.uk/</p>
	<p>If you are struggling to cope and need to talk, trained shout volunteers are available via text 24/7. You can access 1:1 text support through the Crisis Messenger by texting SHOUT to 85258, which will be answered by a trained volunteer.</p>
	<p>Kooth is an online mental wellbeing community, with access to free; safe and anonymous support for anyone aged 11 – 25. There is a range of self-help resources, moderated forums for peer support and live chat sessions with a trained counsellor.</p>
	<p>Provide practical support for LGBTQ+ young people their support included group work and 1:1 for young people aged 11 – 25. https://sayit.org.uk/about/ If you are currently support from SAYiT, speak with a key member of staff if you would need further support.</p>

Appendix H – Static's interview transcript

1. Carys: So, okay can you tell me about your experiences of online communities when you
2. were in school or and college?
3. Static: So, erm, act wha-a-when I was at school there wasn't too much online for creating a
4. space like that, but there would be small group chats that me and friends would have erm at
5. the time for a sense of community but also for keeping in touch outside of school. We, that
6. would be our sort of erm safe space for any discussions regarding (2) identities and such.
7. Carys: When you say like safe space, err what do you mean by that?
8. Static: Erm, so, a couple of us actually came out before things were entirely (.) legal in the
9. UK. [Yeah [so it wasn't something that we would share around, it wasn't something that we
10. would tell other people. It was very close knit to ourselves, erm, and there was erm quite a
11. lot of bullying around that ((tone change)) around that erm sort of topic. So so a safe space
12. for us was something that was entirely ours we had full control of that that group chat, that
13. that little area, erm. And there wasn't any outside interference and there wasn't worries
14. that someone else who wouldn't necessarily agree with our ideas could see it. Well there
15. was at that time only one person who wasn't erm in the community they were not LGBT. I
16. think who wasn't and she was very very supportive because also it was also nice to get her
17. views on things as well, erm. Because she was very sweet about it, very supportive and
18. would listen to us and help us but also explain certain things to us that we didn't understand
19. about how sort of things may be seen or understood by others.
20. Carys: Ahh, (.) almost like a knowledge exchange.
21. Static: Yeah, yeah and we were close enough to her that it erm it (3) that nothing ever bad
22. came about because it, it was positive when we were interacting. (2) But then in college I
23. can't remember the name of the group specifically, but college did actually have, it had it
24. had a Queer youth group, that we would attend. It was a lunch time thing. Half an hour or so
25. in the library. Usually it was people tryin to make friends or meet up to talk about any issues

26. they were having with a counsellor who would often attend, but the counsellor didn't
 27. always attend cause it was also just, I think it was more a group to make friends rather than
 28. discuss specific things (4)

29. Carys: What was your experience of that? Was that helpful having that in person?

30. Static: Honestly, I'm not too sure that it did help me too much, but I know there were
 31. people who it definitely did get better from it cause they found people they would be
 32. friends from it. I was very fortunate to have found people prior to college, that I could talk to
 33. about these things, so going to it was more nice to just be in a little group of like minded
 34. people but, er (.) but I think for me it wasn't too impactful in college.

35. Carys: so, (.) You had found people prior to college, [Yeah who were these people?

36. Static: It was actually a mix of people online and in person. So I had (.) I do still have quite a
 37. few friends online, some of them are in the UK, some of them are across the world where
 38. we've found each other through usually through video games usually or like-minded
 39. interests. Erm, and then got to know each other and made that connection through that
 40. way.

41. Carys: So you mentioned that you've met friends through games.

42. Static: There are games that I play that are called FFO, which are massive multiplayer online
 43. games so there are often these big open world where you can explore and meet others,
 44. through these like game avatars and one for example that I like quite a lot is final fantasy
 45. fourteen. I've met a lot of people through that, all across the world and then gone to events
 46. where I've been able to meet those people. A lot of people that do I end up meeting do end
 47. up being LGBT, I don't know maybe we just attract each other, maybe it's a spiritual like oh
 48. we sense that were LGBT ((laughs)). We should be friends now ((laughs)). But another game
 49. I used to play that I don't anymore is called league of legends I found a couple of friends
 50. through that err... I will admit there were some games where I didn't find any friends
 51. ((laugh)) through. Like call of duty, which is, bit more... (inaudible). Erm, but in the video

52. games its usually. If if you're playing on your own and you go onto an open mic chat you can
 53. just find people who want to talk or if you go and do certain quests, objectives that sort of
 54. thing you can get put into groups for that and then you can become friends with those
 55. people that way.

56. Carys: Oh-h- okay (.) that's interesting. And are those groups of friends important to you?

57. Static: Yeah ((tone sincere)) I think especially the game I mentioned final fantasy, erm it will
 58. sound a little bit weird but I have met people that are quite a lot older than me, I've made
 59. friends with parents with a family erm, but they've been an incredible support network
 60. throughout the years I've been playing games like that really. For me personally it was very
 61. escapism, erm so I find it easier if I'm in a bad head space because if I'm having a bad time
 62. with things even with LGBT issues, having someone to go play video games with and not talk
 63. about it and going you know what, I can think about it another day when you've had some
 64. time to cool off and have played video games that made a lot of things far easier, far easier.

65. Carys: What you do mean by far easier?

66. Static: So I can be quite impulsive, I'm not one to kind of sit around I will go and do things so
 67. if I'm upset or angry I can go okay I want to sort this out now or I can go and hide away from
 68. people but rather than doing that, I learnt to escape instead through video games and with
 69. people who knew my situation, knew what was going on they would be there like "yeah cool
 70. lets play video games until 4 am I can do that" ((laughs)). "I don't have work or school the
 71. next day, it'll be fine". And that has continued well into like adulthood. It has continued and
 72. definitely and definitely made any situation I've been in less instantaneous (.) if that makes
 73. sense. No I don't think that's the right word to use (2) I've had-had to sit and process them
 74. afterwards type of thing, something like that. So by having that space and network of
 75. escapism through that community and video games it has made things easier that way. It
 76. has changed a few times, erm but I-I attend quite big events regularly and I can be quite
 77. outgoing so I can speak ((laughs)) to quite a few people erm so support network while it has

78. never, it has lost a couple of people you know like some people don't wanna be friends
79. anymore that happens in life but. Rather than just staying stagnant it has grown and I know
80. a lot of others who have been helped a lot by it as well.

81. Carys Todd: The escapism?

82. Static: I think for a lot of them it is still the escapism, but I know for some people they like to
83. talk about things as they happen and I'm always happy to do that for other people because
84. that's how they go through those things. So yeah I'll sit with you and go through that. Erm,
85. but the escapism it definitely something that a lot of people I am close to and know tend to
86. use instead and then go back on and think of things after. I will be there for people however
87. they need, a Queer parent. That is something I've done for quite a few years now. Erm,
88. probably since the end of school maybe not even the end of school ((laughs)) maybe from
89. year 10 or so. So like couple of years before finishing school and then whilst also in college.

90. Carys: Really supportive, in looking at what it is each other needs.

91. Static: Yeah, there are definitely negatives that come from it. Times I can misjudge and
92. people may not (2) Say sometimes someone might need the escapism and someone might
93. then offer advice sometimes that can have happened. But I think, knowing that I can offer
94. that help or that people can go to me and say that's not what I need right now can you do
95. this instead I've, that's something that's got better over the years. I think where quite a few
96. of my friends are online, I don't have access to go and see them a lot. It can be quite
97. worrying and stressful if I can't be there to give them any escapism in person because
98. sometimes online gaming you're on a mic you can't see someone's face sometimes it can be
99. a bit difficult. And everyone handles escapism differently but aside from that. But there are
100. times when I can't offer that, I can't give that support, I myself might be too
101. overwhelmed and if someone needed support to talk through it, and my version of it
102. is going through the escapism side of things first and then looking back at it and I
103. can't offer that, then that can sometimes cause a rift but I think its something that

104. the people I'm close to are understanding of me and I'm understanding of them but
105. while it's a negative it's not one that kind of kicks back as much as the distance.

106. **Carys: (.) geographically?**

107. Static: Yeah, Yeah. The physical distance is hard, not being able to go and provide
108. the support and escapism or comfort when someone needs that is difficult. People
109. understanding that I need to provide support online or be there for my online
110. friends. I think the support I've got from online was understood in college (.) in
111. school not as much. But we were all 14 or so mostly worried about exams ((laughs))
112. we weren't really thinking too much about video games. In college I think it was a lot
113. easier for me hence why I didn't do too much outside of it, erm cause I would be
114. online playing video games to people quite a lot or cause I was also working part
115. time whilst at college so I mean I'd do college get it out of the way do my part time
116. job then spend a good few hours online gaming with people just.. defusing, defusing
117. ((questioning tone)) no (.) Like (3) ((hand gesture of palm down pushing down)) yeah
118. ((laugh))

119. **Carys: Like er ((deep breath, breath exhales as hands move downwards))**

120. Static: YES ((louder)) Erm the mic can't see what we're doing ((laugh)) Dehumidifying
121. emotions ((laugh)) decompressing (louder, higher pitch), yeah! ((laugh)) got there!
122. Decompressing. It was more around that sense of it, decompressing. After a day of
123. doing so much, that's where it was for me. I think that's also why I was less open and
124. supportive of other people at the time as there was so much going on and so much
125. support I'd seen people have throughout college that I felt less Queer parent-ey for
126. and then decompressed myself. (3) But, for me college was erm, it was less
127. community support. For me, it was more about just doing what I'd come to do. I
128. didn't really stick around college. I didn't really do too much for the community at
129. that point. That's not necessarily the case anymore. So if I see younger people who

130. are LGBT, so my little brother he is LGBT, erm I am very active in his life making sure
131. he's got the resources that he needs. He does struggle with things, but times are
132. different he has got a lot of people around him who are also LGBT. So I like to like to
133. almost be like a Queer parent to all of them almost. I-I- I like to support younger
134. Queer youth ((eye roll)) younger Queer youth ((tone change)) Queer youth ((laugh))
135. and will often attend pride parades which is still they are still protests, er going to
136. marches and like erm you can sign government petitions. Which once they do get
137. enough signatures the government do have to acknowledge them for anything for
138. things like more accessible health care. I am much more active now than I was
139. throughout college and definitely than I was throughout school. But, I was (.) if
140. if you put it into 3 sections, I was fairly active during school, not active during college
141. and then mostly active now.

142. **Carys: That shift almost, fairly active, not active, mostly active.**

143. Static: Yeah, my perspective has changed on the whole community quite a lot over
144. the past few years.

145. **Carys: What does that look like?**

146. Static: During college I seen more support, but it was more support in a close knit
147. sense whereas in school there wasn't any support, so I had to look more outside of
148. school, erm and now there is stuff at work and I always keep an eye out for it for
149. other people yeah. For a while it was only my friends I was getting support from,
150. school was unfortunately quite a negative experience for me, erm, I did eventually
151. come out whilst at school and unfortunately that backlashed quite poorly. Erm, I
152. then took a year and a half out of school because of it and throughout that time,
153. there was only really my friend group. I couldn't find any support online. Erm, I think
154. it wasn't until 2015 maybe 2016 until I found support online but I was in my last year
155. of school at that point, so (2) so it wasn't too good for the majority of it.

156. Carys: School was quite a negative experience for you.

157. Static: It sounds a little bit weird to say it now, but I was actually the first person to
158. come out in the year group we were in as well as I think throughout the entire
159. school there were so few people who would actually have spoken about it that
160. when I did come out, it did unfortunately spread like wild fire and it wasn't, it wasn't
161. something people liked. When I came out it was just before marriage became legal
162. in the UK (2). Erm, as a result of being different, because people don't like, they fear
163. things they don't understand erm, very quickly I became target to a lot of bullies
164. because they knew something that was personal to me and that become a source of
165. conflict so. So overall I think the main negative thing from it was my timing ((tone
166. change)) I probably could have chosen a better timing to be more open about it
167. ((laughs)). (2) Also a lot of the reactions I got, I didn't see a positive majority until out
168. of school. Including the staff. My tutor at one point said it wasn't to be shown within
169. school at all. I was pulled into a headteacher's office at one point because well we
170. had head of years so it was head of years, so it was a head year. I was brought into
171. the head of years office and was told if I was to date anyone I would be put in
172. isolation because it was frowned upon to be doing any of that sort of thing at the
173. time and that was just the beginning of when I first came out it did slowly get better
174. but I took a year and half out of school maybe a couple of months after coming out.

175. Carys: So you were told you couldn't date anyone or you'd be put in isolation, how

176. did that feel?

177. Static: Not publicly date anyone, it would be a case of PDA so if I wanted to hold
178. hands with a partner so I was like 12 or 13 and so that is all you really do hold hands
179. but yeah it wasn't allowed. When I think of support that would have been helpful,
180. probably acknowledgement because the bullying I faced was pretty physical and
181. teachers didn't do anything and at one point I did get into a fight with someone and

182. almost got suspended because of it and they got off with a lunchtime detention and
183. at the time it felt very targeted because I wasn't receiving any support from the
184. teachers or anything for the bullying. There were counsellors at school, but they
185. were mainly for mental health they weren't for Queer topics to do with mental
186. health, maybe support groups. Towards the end of school I was given coloured card,
187. so if I needed space to go somewhere to get out to have my own time I was allowed
188. to. Erm but that wasn't for being LGBT that was for other reasons I think if that was
189. introduced earlier and I was able to use that space to get away from bullying that
190. would have made things a lot of easier. It was a really hard time, it really was.

191. **Carys: How do you feel reflecting back on that time?**

192. Static: I try to look back on it in a positive way. Cause anyone who knows me, knows
193. I can be very very protective. I like I can get very very scared for other people but
194. very protective of other people, I'm very quick to be like standing in front of
195. someone to make sure they're okay that sort of thing. So my experiences have made
196. me a better person to help others but I didn't want, I don't want to have gone
197. through that. But from having been affected by that it has been more positive than
198. negative. And its, I-I had that time out of school, it was a hard time, it was not easy.
199. That online space very quickly became my only space, erm I probably say that, that
200. year and a half was the most one of the most difficult times of my life that I
201. remember quite well ermm and throughout then because people would still be at
202. school and I didn't have too many friends who wouldn't be at school and at the time
203. I had a lot of American friends, some of them I don't talk to anymore sadly. But,
204. because of the American time zones they'd be free all day and I'd be able to speak
205. to them and my sleeping schedule got completely ruined like I-I was up until 6am
206. most day like but then waking up at maybe 2 or 3 pm ((laughs)) and spending
207. ((laughs)) time like with American friends and such of mine. But if I didn't have that,

208. have those people to talk to at that time I probably would've of got far worse. Erm it
209. was very much my only source of really anything at the time it was very important to
210. me.

211. **Carys: What would of far worse have looked like?**

212. Static: (4) I am sorry if this is a bit too depressing to say but I wouldn't be here.
213. ((Explanatory gesture)) yeah. No, school was pretty horrific in terms of not having
214. support and and being Queer and not having that support did then lead to difficult
215. and different mental health issues as well as from a very young age erm (.) I was
216. diagnosed with both autism and ADHD, so my brain already works different from the
217. norm, or neurotypical brains do sorry. So having all of that pile on top of each other.
218. If that year, if I didn't have that support throughout that year of just escaping with
219. people online playing video games and being able to speak to those people I don't
220. think I would of made it to the end of that year or come back. The support was my
221. entire life for that whole time. It can be difficult to comprehend the extent to the
222. impact the support had when there were not people who were near or I was seeing
223. but they got it and got what I needed. That time was horrific and there was no one
224. or nothing else for me with regards to support at the time. It was actually that
225. support that I had from my online friends to then feel comfortable to then go back
226. to school because at the beginning of that year I felt a bit off , I thought before I had
227. any time off I just wanted to completely drop out I didn't want to go back I didn't
228. want to continue with education. My parents had friends who could get me jobs so I
229. wasn't too worried about that, I just couldn't be in that environment and then I got
230. through that year mentally I did get better. That never felt like it could have been a
231. possibility to even allow myself to consider. I didn't have as much to worry about
232. and so my my happiness overall massively spiked because of the people I was able
233. to be around just online and through that and so, I think I can probably thank them

234. that they're the reason that I went back to school. They're the reason I am still here.

235. Alive. (3).

236. **Carys: Are you glad you went back to school?**

237. Static: Erm, maybe not to that specific school but I am glad that I continued

238. education because I was full on ready to not, not get GCSEs nothing, I am glad yeah.

239. I think where college is more recent for me and I saw things get a lot better with

240. things in college there was a lot more positives in college than I saw in school. I am

241. very glad to see things going in a better direction and even with recent stuff being

242. quite bad, so like laws and such and gender stuff erm, I think (2) something that

243. would be good for the future is just more safe spaces for LGBT people because there

244. were none for us during school and while there are a couple now, I still feel like

245. LGBT youth the word I'd use is shafted what's a better word (.) erm (2) pushed aside,

246. you know?

247. **Carys: Yeah, in terms of being forgotten about?**

248. Static: Yeah completely, they think "oh they're kids they'd never know" when

249. they're kids they need the support, they need someone to speak to – things like

250. that. And, its just the need for these safe spaces really for youth to allow young

251. people to understand their identities and who they are, who they want to be.

252. **Carys: What would that safe space look like in an ideal world?**

253. Static: Well in an ideal world, safe space would just be everywhere. But maybe, erm

254. (2) I think in school counsellors should be much more knowledgeable on things or at

255. least open to learning these things or, teachers definitely shouldn't be so quick to go

256. through their own ideals I get that if you don't feel comfortable around things like

257. that then maybe being a teacher for younger people isn't a good idea ((laughs) erm

258. ((laughs))

259. **Carys: What do you mean by teachers ideals?**

260. Static: So, I knew teachers who were completely homophobic erm, hated the idea of
261. it thought it was a sin. I would regularly be told things like it's, hilariously I laugh
262. about it now, but it's Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve was a huge thing that used
263. to be said a lot, like ((laughs)) like I laugh about it now because it's just such a
264. ridiculous thing said out loud but that was said quite a bit erm. There was a teacher
265. who would be there like "no you're too young to be holding hands with people you
266. can't be doing that". I used to have to get changed in the teachers lounge in P.E
267. because I was banned from being in the changing rooms for being Queer.

268. Carys: Why were you banned from the changing rooms?

269. Static: Because thought I'd look, when frankly I couldn't care less.

270. Carys: How did that (.) feel?

271. Static: Awkward ((laugh)) because the teachers were still in there! No privacy, none.
272. (3) I would regularly skip classes. But I don't think teachers should be allowed in a
273. position of nurturing knowledge in youth or nurturing knowledge at all if they
274. themselves are not open to accepting that people are different if they have such
275. intense views on LGBT situations and it's negative I genuinely don't think they
276. should be able to teach, it's a bit of an extreme view but. How- w-why would I be
277. expected to change in front of the teachers as though I was a danger to other
278. students in the changing room or I would look. Like I was thinking about that all I
279. was thinking about was oh I'm gonna have to get into these awful smelly, the bibs
280. the bibs they made us put on that I'm fairly sure hadn't been washed in about 12
281. years

282. Carys: Or ever washed

283. Static: ((laughs)) they probably weren't. I remember they were awful I'd think of I
284. have to go in a minute and get changed and tag rugby it's cold outside I don't have a
285. coat with me that was my main worry I wasn't looking around the changing room

286. trying to catch a glance. I was 11 through to 16 that was the least of my worries to
287. think about that at the time. What did they think I was going to do.

288. Carys: Almost as though they were sexualising your identity?

289. Static: Massively, massively so. And, that that is still a big thing of people sexualising
290. LGBT people in general not just youth but for example, kids are often told when you
291. grow up you'll have a family like little girls are told oh you'll have kids you'll find a
292. husband who will take care of things or like boys are told you'll find a lovely wife and
293. you'll be the man of the house but then if a kid was to identify as LGBT from a young
294. age, oh no no, no you're too young to know. But they're happy to tell the complete
295. opposite to kids the whole time. Like if you grow up as a girl and you're Queer, girls
296. constantly get, oh do you fancy me? Or boys get oh you don't fancy me. Or another
297. one if you identify as bisexual is, so there is a lot of different flags now so bi, pan,
298. omni, I'm not gonna list them all there are so many. But if you identify as something
299. or someone that likes more than one gender people will often be like you're greedy
300. or (2) you want to have "group times" ((inverted commas with hands in air)) or you
301. want gets hypersexualised a lot, a lot from all ages. Anyone that fits the gender
302. or people you may attracted to, suddenly means you will be attracted to everyone
303. of that gender. Whereas no one goes to a straight cis women and suggests she is
304. attracted to all cis men. It creates er, it creates a sense of wanting to be very clear in
305. yourself almost like when your sexuality is known that people will assume you are
306. telling them because you want to want to be with them or erm fancy them. I found
307. that difficult with teachers, there is always that one male teacher the girls think is
308. good looking but I never wanted a teacher to think because I was Queer I would
309. fancy them or they would think if I spoke to them that it then meant that. There is a
310. misunderstanding there and it creates difficulty in being open with your identity for
311. the fear of how that will be received and if that will impact relationships you hold

312. with people. I sadly I don't think that hyper-sexualising LGBT people will go away
313. until people accept LGBT better I think that one is probably gonna stick
314. unfortunately for a while until people become more accepting overall. I wish that
315. Queer youth, I think I just wish for them to feel safe. I think unfortunately it's as
316. simple as I really want them to feel safe. My little brother who just turned 12 a
317. couple months ago, no ((laugh)) 13, he just turned 13 a couple months ago and he
318. doesn't really have a label for his sexuality but he has dated people of multiple
319. genders, like male, female, non-binary he also does have his thoughts and things on
320. LGBT and how it is for him at the moment. But one thing he doesn't feel safe about,
321. is being around around people who aren't LGBT. He's gotten, I'd say almost afraid of
322. people and he was a very outgoing kid very ((volume raise)) outgoing kid. I just wish
323. he could feel safe, things are a lot better than they used to be but there, he is still
324. not feeling safe. It should be a basic human right, but there isn't much
325. understanding around the issues that LGBT face, until there is more understanding,
326. you know like things like this, it's not gonna get too much better until people do
327. things about. Even at work, so my name didn't use to be *Static which I think is quite
328. a gender neutral non binary name it is not an overly masculine name. Whereas
329. before my name was *Steve, which is a very hyper-masculine name and like I am a
330. masculine, I am a man but I'm not hyper-masculine down at the gym with the gym
331. bros ((laughs)) ((tenses arms)) only talk about football and stereotypically the ideal
332. of what a man or a masculine man could or would do. But erm, I received a lot of
333. abuse from callers, I work in an *office yeah, it's basically an *office and I would
334. receive daily trans-phobic hate all because of my name. "I thought a man would be
335. calling me" or refusing to let me be on their company's account. I found it really
336. difficult erm, out as well I would receive comments about my name and that my
337. voice was feminine or that I "wasn't really a man". I think for me, actually work

338. were really understanding and supportive of me at this time. I think you know, so, I
339. think it is hard sometimes when the support or the people around you have good
340. intentions. So, I am in a relationship with a guy from work and the boss asked, when
341. I was still in eye shot oh how does the sex work then and referenced my genitalia.
342. Situations I know don't come from a malicious intention are hard because people
343. should be educated, more educated than this yet it is on me to do it. The online
344. friends I have and the groups I have created online are still my support at times like
345. that, having people that know me and understand the impact of those conversations
346. and comments is supportive and allowing me the space to escapes. To be me, no
347. questions on my name or my appearance as I can be anyone or present myself how I
348. want to in a safe way online which I think the impact of should not be
349. underestimated. I want there to a be a greater understanding for Queer youth I-I
350. don't want them to have had the experiences I had (2) er and to feel accepted
351. wherever they are. It shouldn't be that Queer people don't feel that there is a place
352. for them in er in the world because there is just need to do more and be open
353. minded and accepting.

354. Carys: Thank you so much, thank you honestly it's such a privilege for me to hear
355. your experiences and for you to share them with me. Yeah, I feel very grateful
356. yeah really thank you for sharing with me. Thank you.

357. Static: You're welcome, always open to talking about everything. We need to do
358. more, more things like this for example it what's going to help and make things
359. change. Being Queer is basically the only minority identity that you're not born into,
360. so of course Queer youth or people who are perhaps understandin their gender and
361. sexual identity more would go to the internet to find that support or information
362. because where else will people get it. Queer people face a lot of discrimination and
363. hate and as a marginalised group need to be able to turn somewhere. So I think

364. understanding this area and what it means to the Queer community is needed.
365. Carys: Oh (.) I had never thought about that, a marginalised group that you're not
366. born into. That is such an interesting point.
367. Static: Yeah Massively.
368. Carys: Yeah. Err Is there anything else you think we've missed or you'd like to chat
369. about?
370. Static: No I think we've covered it. Hopefully you can hear us on the recorder, there
371. are waves moving on the screen which I think means it has picked up the audio.

Appendix I – Alex’s Interview Transcript

Appendix 1a – Alex’s First Interview

The following transcript contains homophobic language, which I have retained in order to properly represent Alex’s narrative.

1. Carys: Can you tell me about your experience of online communities when you attended
2. school or college?
3. Alex: Sure, Sure erm, where do you want me to start? ((laughs)). I think erm actually (3)
4. Carys: We can start wherever you want, I’m interested in your story and like I say I don’t
5. have any set questions (.) happy to follow you-your lead.
6. Alex: Okay, so like I am not like one of those that spends all day online ((laughs)) but
7. when erm (.) we were talking before I am online a lot and I do think erm I am different there.
8. Carys: (.) What do you mean when you say “I am different there”?
9. Alex: Like, so I’m online bare [*standard English meaning: a lot of or very much*] and a lot of that is
10. snap [*standard English meaning: Snapchat*] or what but as much like erm I would never tell
11. people this ((laughs)) (2) there have been times were I-I-I dunno where else or who else I
12. would’ve turned to without certain places online. My TikTok is I swear down just like gay TikTok,
13. the algorithm knew before me ((laughs)) [laughs Okay, I’m just going to start at the start you’re
14. gonna get my whole life story here mush [*Standard English meaning: mate or friend*].
15. Carys: I’m ready ((laughs))
16. Alex: ((laughs)) I loved school, like I was actually like a smart kid ((laughs)) (.) ain’t er wasn’t
17. university anytime ((laughs)) but not a dinny [*Standard English meaning: foolish or stupid*]
18. ((laughs)) but like I had a lot of friends. School was pretty jokes you spend like all day with
19. your friends like it’s long but no? I didn’t have like erm problems with anyone it was just
20. usual school really, didn’t get into like erm trouble just be like if we were all messin in class
21. ((laughs)) (.) I actually miss that nothing really mattered you just ate munch and chill, (2) but
22. then year 9 came and it hit different. All the boys on the team [were getting girlfriends
23. Carys: [the team?
24. Alex: [And I. Yeah, sport was massive to me I like well it is massive to me still, but I played

25. with like so I play footie I played at school but it's not serious but there was a team like outside
26. of school and we'd have practice like erm I think erm twice a week and then a match on
27. *Day and there was a lot of the lads from school on my team but from a few different
28. schools like nearby like we were all just like close you know *local nearby schools.
29. We'd usually play most days you know, that was like my like group I just fucking loved it,
30. coach was top and yeah. So yeah, we'd always just like it was so easy and like everyone sort
31. of knew us in school ((laughs)) was jokes. But, yeah erm like I say erm everyone just talking (3)
32. about girls but I didn't feel that way like I did but I started to erm (5) er
33. **Carys: Take your time**
34. Alex: I started to feel like to guys ((sigh)) (2) feels creepy saying it like that ((laughs)) but I felt
35. dirty and wrong and I wanted to be normal I hated everything about (.) myself. My dad is my
36. hero (.) but he hates er gay people, I didn't know that's how I was feeling but I knew I
37. couldn't feel like this about other lads. It couldn't be you know. It was like a switch where I
38. just wanted to feel like this or I erm I don't know what it was I feeling. I was like jealous (.)
39. when the lads were inviting the girls down town or *local park with us, wasn't just us
40. anymore. But then *Madison in tutor time, made a joke that I was gay because I didn't like
41. any of the girls in our year and *Sophie had told everyone she wanted to get with me. I just
42. like erm laughed it off, like you're all butters [*standard English meaning: ugly*] get me a fit bird
43. you know ((laughs)). But *Mr Taylor said like to everyone, it is none of our concern if *Alex is or is
44. not gay or it is not something to laugh about. Then (.) there and then told everyone he was gay
45. (2) like erm said is like married or something like that to a bloke. (.) I heard his fella is a *job at
46. *location now and all but erm no-one knows.
47. **Carys: How was that er experience for you? How did that feel?**
48. Alex: Yeah, so I was like ((tone change)) wait, there are gay people. *Mr Taylor was decent, he
49. was sporty and not a (2) sorry I'm trying to think like erm not of an offensive word. But he was,
50. like, people liked him, he wasn't like, like I wouldn't have known he was gay (.)
51. **Carys: At the time, were there particular like characteristics, things that you thought were**
52. **indications someone was gay?**
53. Alex: I think it was just stereotypical, like camp men who'd wear pink and sing musicals and

54. cry. I don't obviously think that now but it was like I thought was what it meant to be gay and
55. I was like well that's not me, there must be something like erm medically wrong with me,
56. because I'm not fucking dancing ((laughs)). But *Mr Taylor was not like that. But at the same
57. time, it was harder like everyone was talking about it, the lads were calling him a nonce and
58. a faggot. I hate that word sorry. I just knew I needed everyone to know that wasn't me that I
59. liked girls and girls only. Oh, I forgot actually er, so after all that like erm you know like that
60. sorta words were used in school for time everyone used them like you know "oh that's so
61. gay" ((mimicking an annoyed tone of voice)) and er people would say faggot and words a lot.
62. There were others but can't think. But yeah and er *Mr Taylor he was high up in school erm *job
63. or something and for a time everyone would shout faggot or like er not go in his
64. office if he called them in like in trouble you know. His office was next to classrooms, so
65. there was fights a lot near there and he was like someone what you would shit yourself and
66. stop abit ((laughs)) but that changed. Then school erm they made teachers like they weren't
67. allowed to say if they was gay or lesbian. But I know like *Miss Smith spoke about her
68. husband so think it was just erm gay teachers couldn't. There was this lunchtime LGBT thing but
69. it was for like kids with no friends, think they were all erm all trans but yeah it was there that
70. the teacher said that teachers couldn't anymore. Thinking now that is (.) like not good. Like
71. er I know I didn't want like that reaction what *Mr Taylor got but just knowing there was other
72. people in school or like I guess er (.) role models I think it's important. Like if teachers want
73. to say and that. So yeah (.) I started to try and just get with everyone, anyone but I think it
74. was like I just knew something was wrong with me, but then I was enjoying being with some
75. girls so I just thought like maybe these were just like erm, like maybe I just felt differently in
76. friendships ((laughs)). I don't know it was actually a really confusing time for me. I just sort of
77. erm, so I did this stupid quiz like are you gay? and it said I was and I just shut off I wanted it
78. to tell me I was straight and it would be okay and it didn't. I stopped going to practice and
79. attending school as much, it sounds like not that deep but I erm I felt broken (3) I can't really
80. explain it it was a bit like as though no one could understand how I was feeling. But I I
81. normally go on reddit for like football or just stupid memes there's subreddits for actually
82. everything. But I just started to go on like gay subreddits you know like erm LGBT and from

83. there was like sort of erm like groups and chats or people and everyone would chat. That
 84. was the first time I said like I'm gay, which at the time I thought like I must be gay. (2) I I it was
 85. like I was living two different lives, the one were I was gay and then me at school but I never
 86. felt like me, like *Alex. I was just trying to act and to be like how I saw everyone else. You
 87. know like on them on the erm chats everyone always wanted deep chats and just had
 88. interests that I just I just didn't, like. Do you know Ru Paul's drag race?

89. Carys: Yeah, Yeah I do.

90. Alex: So like, that was a big thing like I now can appreciate it and like whatever but I don't
 91. really enjoy it like love drag queens on a night one you in *local gay nightclub but I'm not
 92. into like fashion and like. Anyway, I just felt like there wasn't a space for me *Alex, no one
 93. wanted me I had to be something I wasn't to either be in school or to be a different part of
 94. me and it felt, I just felt like there no one wanted me. Anyway ((laughs)).
 95. I kept telling myself you have to get off these blogs and websites, and they were you know
 96. erm just like a group of people just chatting but it was like a persona I said I was older than I
 97. was and I was out, like it was bit like (2). Do you have anything you watch, you secretly love
 98. binging but you know wouldn't go into college or erm you know the office ((laughs)) and tell
 99. everyone. Don't at me [*standard English meaning: don't come for me*] but like I love Car SOS

100. Carys: ((laughs)) Car SOS

101. Alex: Oi, what happened to no judgment? ((laughs))

102. Carys: ((Laughs)) No judgement. (2) So for you it felt like these online spaces were that sort of
 103. erm like something to enjoy in secret is that what you mean.

104. Alex: Yeah exactly, like er a guilty pleasure, that's exactly it. I kept telling myself like delete it
 105. and get off it, just be you but I kept going back like I just wanted somewhere where like I
 106. could find out more but also just work out like is this me. I am. Erm, I am quite all or nothing
 107. at times so I think I was just like right well this is me now ((sigh)). I just began to feel safer
 108. like the more I was erm (.) Sorry the more that I was sort of erm reading and talking to
 109. people the more I felt like I can be, be me. Well more me (.) I begun to give me like more of
 110. actually me online, so there was like I think it was like a group chat that had been made from
 111. a erm a blog or actually I think it was reddit but anyway, it was people that were nearby, I

112. didn't give my like name so it felt like *Alex was still me at school but like I said where I lived
 113. and my age and that. I can't explain it but it was the only place where I felt like I was actually
 114. me, like me at school was still me but I was hiding more and more of who I actually was and
 115. it just felt like I wasn't lying online. Well I was ((laughs)) but like I could be me.

116. Carys: you could be you

117. Alex: Yeah, so when I think about what we did before [*referencing the introductory meeting*
 118. *where Alex and Carys completed an arts based activity*] my online self and my real life self it
 119. couldn't at this time, they were two different people. I look back and I just feel gutted, but
 120. there was just no one that I trusted or no one that would have got it you know? But I erm, I
 121. just wanted to be wanted ((laugh)). I just spent more time talking to people who I had met from
 122. these like online chats, I wanted to know who I was but I just felt more comfortable talking to
 123. these. But then, I kind of erm it's like the more like you've got to do or to like prove maybe to be
 124. included and be kept in the chats.

125. Carys: Sorry when you say prove to be kept in the chats, what do you mean?

126. Alex: I'm not explaining this well it became a lot about like gender like everyone was like
 127. trans or non-binary and had like certain thoughts and erm like this one day someone joined
 128. the group and I was like "hey you alright mate", then someone went into a big like whole
 129. thing about their day so I was like ((mimicking a laugh)) he's not said hello like bit ham [*standard*
 130. *English meaning: extra or over the top*] that sort of erm thing. I swear to you, like erm got a lot of
 131. erm hate, because I guessed their pronouns and didn't ask, I just thought like I'm trying to be
 132. friendly. Jesus wept. Everyone getting lairy [*standard English meaning: rude or mouthy*] about,
 133. what? The lad used he him and you know fair, fair if I'd got it wrong. I-I am not transphobic I had
 134. been in these groups and talking with people like erm, oh couple year this point, some people
 135. angry so angry.

136. Carys: So when was this, you said you'd been on these groups for like couple years.

137. Alex: Yeah, must have been like year 10 that sort of time. I think as it was just like I think erm
 138. draining like often it was just draining always being told off so saying or doing the wrong
 139. thing or like I don't know not thinking the same thing, I just wasn't erm really on it as much.
 140. On erm, reddit I met someone who was like my year and also *Local City [Standard English:

141. *Local City] but like not near near me. It was like erm, we just got on so well. I had like got

142. with a couple girls at this point but I had never really erm you know had (3).

143. Carys: I'm not sure I do, like had a relationship you mean?

144. Alex: Yeah, I'd never had been in a relationship, ((laughs)) but also like erm it was year 10 so

145. yeah. I started to talking with *Ben and he was great, it was I think the first time where it felt

146. like *Alex and whoever I was being online like erm joined. I thought like yeah, I'm gay, like this

147. feels right, he was into football and just you know I didn't have to pretend to listen to certain

148. music or I don't know. It was completely online which, I know. I know. I don't want to be that

149. person, who has an online relationship but yeah. It's like erm weird like I have well had

150. people I don't know on snap but have like mutual or like friends of friends or will like now

151. DM people on TikTok. Or even like there are these, well (2) Before big like group chats with

152. people I didn't know that doesn't feel like weird or different feels but like being all trying to

153. find people online just feels (.) no

154. Carys: What feels different to you?

155. Alex: I think, like everyone does it and you know like friends of friends. Everyone had snap.

156. Yeah I think it's just erm, just doing something different. I think like it is erm (2) so the same

157. but also like erm not. In a way it feels like this is what you do when you don't have friends

158. and to be me having my friends and the people I had was like important. People with no

159. friends are the ones that create creepy online groups ((laughs)). But erm, yeah so me and

160. *Ben I know what it sounds like but we got serious quickly and you know I think I loved him (.) I

161. didn't tell anyone but he knew me, like we had each other on socials and like knew

162. everything about each other but like real. I stopped seeing my friends as much they knew

163. something was different but I just, whatever. They erm, is what it is but me and *Ben got more

164. serious it got like a lot quick. We sent (2) pictures ((tone change)) to each other but I thought

165. it's okay we are together. But he wanted to tell people were together, wanted to like put my

166. name in his bio and tag me. I think some people knew of him like we had mutuals and he was

167. out. I erm, I didn't want people to even know I was his friend. I wasn't ready, I wanted more

168. time.

169. Carys: Yeah. How was that experience?

170. Alex: Well buckle in ((laughs)). I think he just, he just wanted something I wasn't ready for. I

171. was getting messages from people we both knew in like online groups to say that like I messing

172. him around and just giving me shade. Fair. We then met up, I just did not want anyone in my

173. real life to see him. He went to this (2) LGBT youth group, *local youth group you

174. know it?

175. Carys: Yeah I've heard of it.

176. Alex: Well we went, that was not my crowd. They were all er losers. I am not proud of this

177. but they would be the people my friends would not know or maybe like erm tease a bit

178. maybe. I am not like that anymore but at that time, I erm I'm not yeah I'm not proud of

179. everything I was. With your job you'll know about this, but, like erm, most people there I

180. think had like (3) would have needed help at school, like erm special needs. Can you say

181. special needs? Don't answer that. Like I swear down most people there like their personality

182. I swear to you was like being gay or trans or whatever, that and weird hair. I sound like I

183. think I'm better than them, maybe I did think that but everyone was so happy like

184. they just fit in and knew the words to say and who they were and I felt like I was in erm (.)

185. Mars I just had like where am I. *Ben was different there, it just put me off him, gave me the ick.

186. Carys: Seeing *Ben in the group, gave you the ick?

187. Alex: Yeah ((laughs)) I didn't think you'd know the word ick

188. Carys: ((laughs)) ((laughs))

189. Alex: Yeah it really did. I just saw like a different side to him, like we were so different. He

190. was so comfortable in that space and I guess it was like a thud of like the two different

191. *Alex's can't mix. I know like I was year 10 like it's not that serious but I think for me it was

192. like that whole like reminder that there is no one like me. Why was it such a big thing, that

193. maybe I do like erm maybe I am gay but like I'm also not a loser(.) nah but like I also have

194. friends and have things I enjoy like erm football. I know you'll get me, like I think as you

195. become an adult it's not like that in erm in LGBT or erm Queer spaces but it was so hard at

196. school for me to like erm find someone in real life where I could be completely me.

197. Carys: Mm

198. Alex: It erm it blew up, *Ben went nuts. He I think felt like I was judging his friends, fairs I was.

199. He wanted us to stay together but I just wanted to like erm just be at school and whatever

200. you get me? He sent my (3) pics to everyone, so we had people that we both knew at first it

201. didn't really get to my school yet. I erm ((sighs)) (3) ((draws long breathe)) Sorry (4)

202. Carys: I can imagine this is really hard to talk about. We don't have to talk about anything

203. you don't want to. How are you feeling? (2) We can break or stop at any time, you're in control.

204. Alex: No yeah I'm good, I want to talk about it. I erm ((sigh)) I didn't think I'd get upset. I'm

205. being proper wet ((laugh)) (2)

206. Carys: Should we have a break? Can get a brew?

207. Alex: No, no I'm good to carry on. Just surprised myself ((laughs)). Yeah, the (2) pictures took

208. time to get around but I knew straight away when *Ben shared them and I erm I didn't know

209. what to do. I couldn't go to anyone as I didn't want anyone to know I'd erm I'd been seeing a

210. lad and I knew that if I said to anyone they'd just I would be in trouble like they'd just

211. give the usual about online your future will be over trust no one. But like everyone does. I had no

212. one to tell but I knew what was coming, I er, I wanted to die, like it felt like this is the end.

213. Everyone will know like. I think this I wish there was someone I could of erm talked to won't lie.

214. There was a blog I sometimes went on, where a few people would like game or whatever

215. together so I was like gaming and then I just proper broke down and said. It felt like the only erm

216. people I could be honest and they were like this is just one really bad week and like it's a pic and

217. that right now is bad but no one will know who it is from like as in like it won't out you.

218. Crying to strangers but you know I knew they er didn't know who I was and always like I just

219. needed to let it out. I was like you know, yeah like if I don't care maybe they won't it could be

220. from a girl you know. Well it just wasn't like that, everyone had seen it. So I had had like a few

221. days off school and then I went in and we got erm we had P.E and the lads wouldn't let me in

222. said I was pervy and a nonce and then one of my best pals said I tried to touch to him or was

223. staring at him getting changed. One of the girls walked past and shouted nice knob you gayboy,

224. Alex is a batty boy. That was the worst point of my life. I, I went into the yard and punched a

225. window ((laughs)) dinlo [*Standard English meaning fool or stupid*]. One of the teachers on patrol

226. like shouted and made me go in the office to explain, I thought at this point nothing to lose but I

227. wanted to like erm like I didn't want anyone to think that I could actually be a gay. So I was trying

228. to say about like what the lads were saying, the teacher just said “stop being a squinny”
229. [*Standard English meaning someone who moans or complains a lot*]. Just didn’t care like I was
230. saying like this has happened and like why I’d been angry and literally that I’m just a squinny, like
231. I’d punch a window for fun or something.
232. **Carys: The response being told to stop being a squinny from a teacher. How did that feel?**
233. Alex: I knew no one cared like how is that like what nah I don’t understand it. Even with like
234. the angry kids they be kicking off cos there’s no fucking yazhoo left. I was erm glad though
235. like I think before I was thinking of like er telling a more sound teacher but glad I didn’t. I
236. had to go and see the safeguarding office and then erm that was it. I I didn’t want to go to
237. school after that. So this must have been like end of year 10 at this point. My auntie lives in
238. *area and I just stayed with her the whole summer between year 10 and year 11 didn’t
239. see no one. I erm, I think this was most amount of time I spend online at this point. I wanted
240. to hide, I wasn’t ready for everyone to know I was gay (.) or see my dick ((laughs)) sorry. I just it
241. was really difficult. I started like gaming and just chatting to people over the summer, I didn’t
242. really sleep or eat I was not looking after myself but. It was like the same people I’d game
243. with and we’d chat and they become the only people I’d talk to. Sometimes I’d just shit talk
244. in the games for a laugh but I actually become I relied on these people, I think here was the
245. first time in my life where I erm, where I could be me. I didn’t care enough to try and fit in
246. and I could be me, whoever that was. But I think then when (.) summer ended it was quite a
247. shock like erm coming back and knowing I’d have to face everyone. I just thought like
248. everyone will still be talking about it. At the start of year 11, I was meant to start but I think I
249. made myself sick with how erm like stressed out I was feeling. My mum forced me to go the
250. second week, school were calling by and that. I went early as I had to meet with my head of
251. year as I’d missed the first week, they rung and had a go saying like this is the most
252. important year of life, no time for petty feuds is what they said. No one got it. When I got
253. there though, like the lads just pretended not to know me. Like it was as if they didn’t care
254. but they didn’t want to know me. It hurt (.)
255. **Carys: It being described as a petty feud, felt like no one understood.**
256. Alex: Yeah. But like some of the girls who I’d been like friendly with before, where like

257. intense ((laughs)), *Ellie was obsessed with having a gay friend I swear. I didn't even realise
258. we were friends. She just wanted to know what the lads said about her and being on snap,
259. she put a pride flag on I swear down everything ((laughs)). "This is best friend Valentina,
260. she's an ally. Talk Valentina" ((American accent)) You know that?
261. Carys: "Ally" ((American accent)) ((laughs)) yeah I know the video you mean.
262. Alex: ((laughs)) Yes ((laughs)). So er yeah school had called my mum to tell her what
263. had happened and she had agreed not to tell dad so like there me thinking one of these is
264. gonna talk and my dad will hear. I but I was pretty erm just like I wanted to chill with them,
265. and have friends. I tried to have a kick around at break and everyone just went and played
266. wallsey round the corner felt like the kid no one want to play tag with ((laugh)). But
267. nah like it was hard, I just tried to become this version of me that meant erm the girls
268. wouldn't ditch me. I was like I was a completely different *Alex to who I was a year ago. We
269. had this like erm, like outside building for anyone that was like always in trouble or needed
270. like extra help. One of the girls I was friends with now, was friends with someone in there
271. and we started to chill. She had lots of like older friends but also went to like loads of LGBT
272. events and things and clubs and I'd go with her, and like it was so different to the youth club
273. like everyone was so like sound and like understood what I'd erm what I was going through. I
274. can't really explain it but it was like the things what I'd got from like the online groups but like
275. real and more real for like me like erm I could be the real me. So yeah er the girl she was bi and it
276. was the first time I was like oh wait I think that's me. Like I just thought that as I did erm did like
277. guys that it had to mean I was gay. But it was weird like I was in like groups and that with like
278. erm LGBTQ but it I don't know it wasn't like actually like I don't remember anyone talking about
279. it. I had heard the term but not thought about it. As we were spending like more and more time
280. together, we just like got on so well and then(.) begun like dating you know. The reaction from
281. everyone else was bad, the girls were friends with me literally just because they thought I was
282. gay. *Nikita did not care about what anyone though, but I'm not like that I think I was still feeling
283. like erm isolated and just like I don't know, had she of not been so like not caring like I wouldn't
284. of coped. This was like the time of lockdown, and then school shut, so it was weird it was like all
285. of sudden we had to like submit coursework and stuff quickly like as we were doing GCSE's was

286. in I think maybe March time.

287. Carys: oh of course, all of the school closures.

288. Alex: Yeah I think like lockdown sort of forced me online, especially as other than *Nikita I had

289. no one. Again. It like I can't erm like all of this changed my whole world changed because

290. what I'm bi, why does it matter. It makes me really angry if I think about it too much it

291. doesn't make any sense to me, I don't understand it like what is the like what is the deal?

292. Where like everyone was online, there was more things like I was on TikTok so much, who

293. wasn't. I didn't like post videos. Me and *Nikita would make them as a jokes but they'd be on

294. private like just us. It'd was like fun to watch the videos, I think like erm as it got bigger like I

295. did start following certain people and like on my for you page was literally just LGBTQ videos

296. those videos and small like snippets of watching and hearing people I think was the some of

297. the most like erm comforting stuff. Like it was like so many videos or like jokes and I'd be like

298. 'yes'. I actually have ended up like in kind of like I have a few friends from TikTok like

299. creators that aren't you know viral and then there's a few people I know from like the

300. comments on big videos. Like it was just like normal people, or like just talking about stuff

301. that, and until this it was like to be honest like hard to find the stuff I needed or want or like

302. people were erm pretty cagey. College was different, like at the start(.) covid was still there

303. and did have a big like difference. But like me and *Nikita were still a thing. When erm, when

304. things did reopen, my timeline of lockdowns and covids to be real has merged into one.

305. Carys: What felt like the big difference at college?

306. Alex: Oh it erm it wasn't like normal college, there was like covid stuff you know like trying to

307. be like covid safe so it wasn't erm like *college is now.

308. Carys: Ahh, okay.

309. Alex: When things did reopen again, erm *Nikita and me we, we went back to the like LGBT

310. club thing, it's not like a club club but you get me ((laughs)) but we went like as couple like

311. we held hands. I have never felt so out of place. So they'd done like a few like online stuff

312. and that and I'd joined them you know quizzes and that and was a laugh but just on on my

313. own. Someone there at the in person group told me I was infiltrating a safe space for Queer

314. people and that why did I think I had the right to be there as a cisgender male I think I'm

315. entitled to be in all spaces. I was like oh erm no I'm bi, but that made it worse (.) It was like it
 316. only mattered what the gender of whoever my who I was you know getting with was right
 317. now or something. We was not welcome there, like straight privilege and that meant like I
 318. pass as a straight person, as though it didn't matter how hard things had been or like we'd
 319. been there before like I wasn't different to what I was before just felt like once again I wasn't
 320. right for where I was. Since I was with *Niks it did change things with like er other Queer
 321. people like I I didn't count. I don't belong in straight places especially when I'm dating a
 322. guy but then I don't in Queer spaces like where do I belong, where is there a erm room for
 323. me(2). Do you get that? Like do you feel comfortable or like erm welcome in LGBT or erm
 324. you know Queer spaces?

325. Carys: Do you think that a lot of bi people aren't welcome in those spaces?

326. Alex: ((laughs)) Yeah I think erm, it's hard especially as we easily pass as straight or when
 327. people are in you know straight relationships it isn't accepted. I was just asking you like
 328. is this something you feel or has happened to you, like do you feel accepted and that?

329. Carys: (.) I think it can often be hard to feel (.) welcome, in LGBTQ+ spaces or er safe spaces
 330. especially when I'm in a relationship with someone of the opposite sex, yeah, or perhaps more
 331. for me it's knowing if I'd attend (.) I think that erm sometimes it's felt more comfortable when
 332. I've been in a same sex relationship. Do you erm do you feel finding shared experiences amongst
 333. other people who are LGBTQ+ is supportive?

334. Alex: Massively, knowing that you are not like that you're not the only one is important. I
 335. have spent a long time feeling different and broken and I'm the only one. I understand that
 336. my that my experiences are likely to be so more less hard as a bi man but I just wish that I
 337. was accepted. Like to me it feels like I'm in the margins no one wants me in their club
 338. ((laughs)) you get that? Like I'm not straight and I can't always relate to a lot of that but I'm
 339. not like erm accepted in Queer spaces. But then like I think especially after that I really did,
 340. erm I really did turn to like online groups more for that. I prefer erm I like actual real life
 341. things but like I just wanted to not feel alone or like erm like what is wrong with me. Do you
 342. know what I mean?

343. Carys: I think I know what you mean, that feeling of where do I fit? But not fitting neatly into any

344. one space perhaps?

345. Alex: Yeah, yeah it really is that. Just think I've wanted a place where people are like yeah
 346. you're accepted here. You know like support websites that are all over colleges and that, I
 347. started going on them and like they have forums and chat stuff and I went on them a lot just
 348. talking to other people and like knowing there wasn't nothing wrong with me. Online, it was
 349. easier to find that, it's not like for me to be honest but like I could search like bisexual on
 350. TikTok and find like super related videos or just creators yes. In a way. I really wish that it
 351. didn't matter and erm that no one cared but. That what it is I see. I'd like to one day feel like
 352. my online and my in real life selves could be the same I could be me, I could draw them out
 353. again and they be the same or they be you know what I want them to be. I don't think I can
 354. be out like you know erm actually out to my family, my dad's views are strong and like erm
 355. my mum is (.) shes a top girl. When I first was dating *Nikita and then I erm I introduced her to
 356. mum. Mum says to me like I love you but I am so glad it was a phase with the boys.
 357. I felt ((sigh)). I felt like my heart broke. I don't know why it matters and for me shouting into
 358. the void of the online like gay spaces or you know erm communities has given me with some like
 359. space. You know like when something goes wrong or like erm even when you know done bad in
 360. like coursework no one will fix it or change it but you feel like lighter you feel like better just
 361. telling someone you know who cares or you you trust or even will listen like. That how it feels, I
 362. know it's not erm it's cool ((laughs)) but I don't know if I will ever be able to be me. Like fully me.
 363. There wasn't a space to even discuss it at school when I needed to, and then it was just like erm
 364. told to mum. The teachers didn't even tell me or like ask me like "oh this is what we'll tell your
 365. mum", a pic is a pic don't really change what I done, it being to a boy or a girl no? It was sorry (.)
 366. but it was clearly a bad time for me and it was like that I was erm the one in the wrong and then
 367. oh to add in he's gay. If it had been my dad, I-I think he'd of wanted to kill me (3) just yeah. They
 368. don't think of that maybe cos to them you know I'm just a kid but. College is better, like college
 369. is chill. I'm in my last year I'm doing erm like sports, it's er it's *sports course.
 370. Because I started a course and then I erm didn't continue with that, it was *different course
 371. but I was just getting a lot of shit for doing it, lots of people from my school came same college
 372. so It weren't worth to me. I really like sport and stuff though so it worked out good. The staff are

373. like open and it's more like chilled rather than at school so like a few staff spoke around like
 374. pride last year and about themselves and like don't know like it made a difference. To me it did
 375. anyway.

376. Carys: It made a difference to you having staff talk about their personal experiences

377. Alex: Yeah, like it really did. I've enjoyed chatting, been talking for ages ((laughs)) I hope it's
 378. helpful and that.

379. Carys: Thank you so much, it is such a privilege to hear your story and chat with you. I

380. know this wasn't an easy conversation and I am grateful you trusted me with it. I know I said
 381. before but I've got some organisations and numbers in case you did want some support but
 382. we'll chat about that once I've hit stop. Was there anything else you wanted to share or chat
 383. about?

384. Alex: Nah, thank you for doing this I think like erm I think I got a lot from online communities
 385. I just erm I just wish that it hadn't of been needed like I wish that like I could just be me *Alex
 386. and no one cared who I dated. One day. I think everyone creates community online, I don't
 387. know anyone who weren't online or that at school on snap and stuff so shouldn't get like
 388. hate like we're all on our phones all day anyway it shouldn't be like a weird thing to have
 389. people what you know online. Just should be like actual support in school like a place we can
 390. go and be safe and that. Thank you Carys, I've enjoyed this.

391. Carys: Thank you so much *Alex

Appendix 1b – Alex's Second Interview

1. Alex: Yeah (.) erm, I think (.) I wanted to I've been thinking about the interview and what (.)
2. What I think about I guess (.) I think my family have a big impact on the way I think about
3. like online communities or being online or meeting people online or er really like er how I
4. feel about LGBTQ things. I was thinking after like why do I think this and do I think finding
5. people who get you online is cringe or do I think that i think I should find it cringe ((laugh))
6. and then yeah I yeah was like you know having a family where it's not even just their not

7. accepting but goes against what they believe I think it did impact how I have experienced
8. like making like community online and this is what this is all about no?
9. **Carys: Yeah exactly that, my research is exploring experiences of online commun[Yeah ities.**
10. Alex: That what I was thinking and that I think I was erm harsh towards gay people maybe (.)
11. sometimes I get like caught in like what do I actually like, what do people around me think
12. like even people online and that and then what would my family want me to think that I'm
13. like what do I think ((laugh)). But yeah just been thinking about it since we met and and I
14. don't think it was something I really like erm said.
15. **Carys: Yeah of course, what was it that you have been thinking about since we met?**
16. Alex: It's mainly just like, well that I have (.) a lot of err erm shame about who I am (.) and I
17. felt that it was bit lame that I have friends online and that I-I didn't want it to be "oh *Alex
18. has no friends" or like I don't know that I was not able to have friends or be around people
19. and so I had to make friends online or something. I do I do think it is er embarrassing or that
20. other people think that it should be embarrassing to have online friends or sometimes I
21. think adults (.) oh fuck I'm an adult ((laughs)) but teachers think that you know that only
22. tragic people would have people that are (.) close or er important to them online. Like it's
23. not a real friendship or even er relationship if it's online and I think back to times when the
24. groups and people I was ((inaudible)) online with were so important to me, got me through
25. isn't it.
26. **Carys: Your relationships online were so important to you. (4) You mentioned you had a lot**
27. **of shame about who you are, what do you mean by that?**
28. Alex: Yeah (.) I just (.) I always wished that life was just more simple and that. That I could be
29. who my dad wants me to be and (.) I know that I might find a girl and marry her and have
30. that, that normal life or I guess erm (.) traditional, I guess the right thing to do and I know my
31. family would be so proud and happy of me if that was like if I did do that. It's like my
32. relationships like who I'm with is more important than anything else about me. The shame is
33. like erm, my relationships for sure. Relationships I've had with men before or like knowing
34. the people that I would like to be in a relationship with, or thinking like if I am to have that
35. traditional relationship they wouldn't be able to know about me,

36. Carys: Sorry what do you mean?

37. Alex: Just like erm, if I was to be in a relationship or like marry a women it still feels like that
 38. would be a lie because I don't think I'd be able to say I'm bi to them or that I do also like
 39. men. I don't think I could have a traditional marriage by dad would approve of with
 40. someone I would be honest about who I am to with me I think is what I mean ((laugh)). But
 41. then I also think like does that have to be like my whole like personality is the fact that I
 42. don't just like girls seems. I don't know how I feel about it. But like I do feel shame that
 43. when I think about my future I think I would want to be with a man I think (.) yeah I do think,
 44. but then it's like to me like that would be a choice then between them or my family, like
 45. who I would get to be with. My dad is Muslim and my mum goes mosque but she isn't
 46. Muslim, she's lived in *Local area her whole life and I-I think you know she's not like mad
 47. about the idea of me being gay ((laugh)) but I don't think she'd she'd disown me. When I
 48. was talking before about erm, school and that and them teachers that sometimes would say
 49. they was gay there was never like teachers in school, as in Muslim teachers that ever spoke
 50. about anything to do with being gay or what they thought about like gay people. I go
 51. mosque for Eid but I don't prayer or I-I I'm not Muslim I don't think, like I eat (.) like food I
 52. eat I make sure is Halal but I don't know much about Islam, like my dad is Muslim but not
 53. like full on if you get me. When I, so when I was like in primary I think, my uncle, he's not my
 54. actual uncle but he's just ((laughs)) we call him uncle, he came round and was saying that a
 55. man local was possessed by a jinn and it was erm (.) he was seen kissing another man and
 56. everyone was saying it was the evil Jinn and he had to go to the Iman and get it out of him,
 57. like the evil inside of him was making him do that, like like no Muslim would be kissing
 58. another man unless they were possessed I guess?

59. Carys: An evil Jinn?

60. Alex: Yeah, like erm people think it's like a spirit like demon but it possess a person like
 61. completely takes over them. You know I don't know if people actually believe it in now, or
 62. what but like this is what I proper remember. Although this was time ago but this is what I
 63. remember of it maybe there was more to it, like more uncle was doing. But I-I don't think I
 64. believe that but my dad wants me to be like a good Muslim I think but it feels like, this thing

65. about me that is wrong. He is always asking like oh when are going to get married, find a
66. wife and all that. But like at my school all, like the teachers and that basically all of them are
67. Christian probably. I think *Miss Khan was *ethnicity she's Muslim but I would never of wanted
68. to talk to her, like I think like in person you just don't know what like people will say or like
69. what their view will be. There was no one in school I thought would understand or be like
70. yeah I guess get it. Online I felt like you could just read or watch what people said and not
71. even have to like directly message or talk to people and still like read and get information,
72. but like actually like talking to someone you just don't know what they'll say or they might
73. just tell my dad or my family or think really bad of me or I'll I wouldn't know what to say
74. anyway ((laugh)). But, there is like groups online and like stuff what I read online about like
75. being gay and lesbian and that and Muslims. And I don't know what I believe but it is I think
76. it is a big part of my life or I think maybe could be and there are people and that that know
77. and follow Islam but are gay and like have gay relationships. I think I find that hard to talk
78. about (.) my family, but that is what has made things harder and that because erm (2) being
79. gay isn't allowed in Islam and my dad is from *Country (.). He moved over to England when he was
80. young but like you are not allowed to be gay there. Having someone I could ask and talk to
81. people that know what having Asian family and not like being able to come out or even
82. knowing like what does Qur'an say. I just kept wanting to ask like am I haram. I had (.) well
83. have so much shame and so much of it is about myself is knowing how I feel about other
84. people is er haram I think. My mum is not a convert, but they had an Islamic wedding and
85. like she goes mosque at times and stuff but like I think my dad wishes she were Muslim and I
86. think like I have disappointed him. But knowing it's not just me and like so much of what is
87. there in that like what people say to people who are figuring out relationships and who they
88. are it says about being open but like talking with people which I can't. So just like seeing
89. people who are like from same background or who are Muslim and gay or whatever like (2)
90. just erm. Before I felt like I was the only person that was going through this and felt this but
91. (.) no I wasn't. I've not erm met up with anyone I speak to but these people get it. I actually
92. found people most on like Instagram you know or like erm Tik Tok like they call themselves
93. Queer Muslim content creators, like more like actual influencers not like subreddits. Just

94. being able to like watch their videos and like being part of their like, group in a way. You
95. know like Tik-Tokers that are like verified and they do videos like talking to everyone or
96. saying like “thank you for all your support” and you are like erm part of that like group and
97. space and there are in jokes that the influencer talks about and you’re a part of it or you
98. know what’s going in their life or just like that. I think like that’s what I mean (.) you know
99. when we were saying before like what is an online community, like that is that community
100. on these particular creators like accounts for me is. I’m trying to think now, but like
101. (.) so there’s this one girl and she is a lesbian right but she is Muslim and I follow her
102. and I’ve like found other people who have commented on her posts or follow her
103. and have like DM’ed them and then like I am actually proper close to people I’ve just
104. like found through that. ((picks up phone)) Oh Yeah ((loud, higher pitched)) *creator.
105. So I found that account on er I think actually it was someone who I erm follow on Tik
106. Tok then posted about them or like maybe commented with them, but yeah their
107. like all about LGBT Muslims, they post so much information and have like online
108. groups and I have found people through them and have erm I don’t know why I find
109. this like embarrassing to admit ((laugh)) but I have DM’ed the account just like
110. asking questions and that about like everything really and that has been you know
111. like actually been a big part of the support and just like erm comfort I think comfort
112. yeah I get. Oh no the *online account and all you know, like accounts like that
113. even though it’s not like a group made to like chat like not like a forum but like even
114. just an account that is like about this and then getting information from that and
115. then finding other people who follow and comment if that makes sense [Yeah Like I
116. still like actively follow them if you get me. But yeah erm what was I saying yeah so
117. like when I said like my dad can’t know I’m gay I don’t know what he’d do, I think
118. he’d send me to my grandparents or I just don’t know but I felt like there was a place
119. for me in these groups, like er online even though I never erm like I’m not Muslim
120. you know? I do still get like good things from the groups what I spoke about before
121. and the LGBT groups but yeah I didn’t talk about these. I didn’t want it to be like erm
122. (2) I didn’t want it to be like obvious it was me ((laugh)) but also it to seem like I

123. don't know. There is good support or like information, like I'm talking even like
 124. practical stuff of like how to hide a relationship or if someone in the community sees
 125. you out with someone what is helpful you know, like what can you say to them but
 126. then just people get it or you know erm support sorta of groups. But then like, you
 127. wouldn't know how to find these people in like actual life I find that's more on like
 128. Tik Tok like once I've like erm followed or just you know when it's on your for you
 129. page yeah it's like those sort of things really.

130. Carys: So it was getting support from people online who really understood what er
 131. how you might feel, particularly when you wouldn't know how to find those groups
 132. of people in actual life?

133. Alex: Yeah, like yeah. I think like Islamic communities can be pretty like close and
 134. that so I just even like knowing that people might know you, I don't know how you
 135. would know who you could like approach like (2) ((laughs)) what the hell would you
 136. even say? "Alright Mush [*standard English meaning: friend or mate*] (.) you gay?"
 137. ((laughs)). Like no one I knew in my school was Muslim I don't think, no one nearby
 138. went to my school. So I think it just gives hope that there are people out there what
 139. get it (2) but like maybe you know ((shrugs)) maybe it isn't a choice between like my
 140. dad and being gay but like. I keep saying gay, I'm not gay I don't think ((laughs)) but
 141. you get me. Knowing that it might be like, I'm not possessed but like someone being
 142. gay or bi it's not a curse on you or your family, but equally like I wouldn't want to
 143. introduce like a man or whatever to my family and then them to like be taking to be
 144. me to get an exorcism ((laugh)) I don't think it would be that but there would not be
 145. like erm acceptance. I just know it's not something I can be speaking to my family
 146. about. After everything that happened with school and the dick pics and that like my
 147. mum does not want to like have them conversations and she is just trying to like
 148. pretend that is not me or something what she needs to deal with. I know she'd pick
 149. my dad over me but like I don't want that to happen, but like who the fuck do you
 150. talk to about that. Like how fucking mad to be like oh yeah my dad might think im
 151. possessed. I'd sound like a nutter. Nah I don't know if it does think this, but it's just

152. like erm knowing that there are people who you can say these things to, or like you

153. know people won't just say "Oh but talk to your dad he loves you."

154. Carys: Having people you could talk to that understood was really helpful then?

155. Alex: Yeah (2) like so much. I'm gonna have to head but I wanted to tell you about

156. this, I didn't really even think of it before I don't think I don't know. But (.) thank you

157. for meeting with me again and yeah I think I do think it's important people know like

158. it's not actually that lame like it's a proper like proper like important it's everything

159. like having people that will understand or try to understand how you're feeling that

160. you don't have to explain everything to because they get it or people who won't be

161. judgemental, like it means so much. Thank you for doing this, I hope it goes alright

162. and that ((laughs))

163. Carys: Thank you and thank you for meeting with me again and sharing your

164. experiences, I really appreciate it. Hope your shift goes alright ((laugh))

Appendix J- Glaze's Transcript

1. Carys: So, could you tell me a bit about your experiences of online communities
2. when you attended school or college?
3. Glaze: Yeah. So (.) Well, one thing that I would find is that actually, without the internet, I
4. would not have not been able to find sort of the words to describe myself and my identity
5. anywhere near as easily. (.) So like, growing up, I knew gay and straight. And that was it. And
6. it was only sort of once I was in sort of secondary school, and once I sort of started sort of
7. exploring on the internet, ermm they'd be like, "oh, so there's a word bisexual" and I was
8. like, "Oh, that makes sense" ((laugh)) (.) I was I think I was like, I don't think I'm a lesbian.
9. Erm But yeah, so I was like, oh, no, that sounds like me. (2) And then sort of in terms of erm
10. gender, I've sort of gone through so many different, like, I-I-I find a certain one thing that
11. fits, and I sort of think about a bit more maybe like, I was like, obviously, as I got older, I
12. think maybe I don't actually identify with that so much any more. But as I was growing up and
13. (.) exploring different terms, and and I guess I-I-I found I've just kind of just like settled in
14. where I am, like I've been I was able to explore that online. But I-I-I don't think I could do
15. that so much sort of like in real life, so obviously on online I could kind of, you know, (.) I
16. spent a lot of time on Tumblr. Erm And you don't really have like a face attached to
17. anything. It's just kind of a er blog name. And that's it. So it's very easy to explore things in a
18. way where no one from real life could know who I was, no one could (.) er-er I wasn't going
19. to be outed by a Tumblr blog, because no one really from real life knew me there. Erm, yeah,
20. er.
21. Carys: So Tumblr felt safer maybe?
22. Glaze: Yeah. Yeah, definitely. Erm, I think one thing sort of throughout school, erm I very
23. much am the type to (2) erm I'm quite meek, I've just kind of kept my head down, erm (.) tried
24. to draw as little attention to myself as possible. Erm (.) and then I did sort of end up like, (.)

25. when I didn't eventually sort of like come out as bi, it was very weird, all the attention was
 26. on me for like, a day, but then, you know, the next gossip comes out. So it was fine. Erm I-I-I
 27. didn't have like, so many, like, I didn't really have any, like negative experiences with like
 28. teachers or anything like that. Erm but it was more sort of, it was never acknowledged at all.
 29. So it wasn't like, there was no support that would have been offered or anything, it was just
 30. no one mentioned, like anything at all. So I was just kind of left on my own to it. Erm.

31. **Carys: How did that feel?**

32. Glaze: Erm, I guess it felt abit sort of, (took a drink) I guess isolating in a way it's sort of it (2)
 33. obviously, it it was it was a time where I felt like this was something that made me
 34. completely different from everyone else. Erm, and I felt like that amongst my peers. Erm,
 35. and rather than, just like you know, maybe just like, I feel like even just a teacher
 36. mentioned, like, is there anyone that you could speak to about this or anything like that?
 37. Erm, there wasn't everything like that. So I-I-I just kind of felt like I was all alone with it. Like,
 38. I couldn't, like say, if I was I felt like I could tell (.) say if something had happened, or did
 39. happen, like, if something did happen to me, I wouldn't be able to go to a teacher about it, I
 40. wouldn't be able to receive support for it. Erm and sort of where, (.) obviously, where I
 41. obviously I tried to, (.) like say keep my head down not, draw attention to myself. So I never
 42. experienced like physical bullying or anything like that. Erm (.) but sort of, I think, sort of
 43. online, and just people just like spreading rumours about me happened a lot at school, (.)
 44. which around because it would only usually the people that like, at the time I considered my
 45. friends who would then be saying stuff, like behind my back for about me. Or like there was
 46. this one guy who was like, I wasn't even really friends with him. But I was at a time I was
 47. friends with his girlfriend. And after like I came out as bi only to them, I wasn't out to everyone
 48. yet. Like, these are people that I thought I could trust with this information. And then he
 49. sent me like, (.) porn accounts and stuff very, like we were teenagers. So I didn't want to see
 50. that-t. And he was like, oh-h, but your bi, so you'd like it right? And I was like, "no, no,

51. thank you". Erm but yeah, I never felt like I could like go to a teacher or anything about that

52. because I didn't feel like I'd ever get that support. from them. Erm but yeah

53. **Carys: Can I ask, what was it that made you feel like you couldn't get that support?**

54. Glaze: Erm, I guess it just because it was, so like, unacknowledged. It was like no mention of,

55. being (.) like anywhere in school like it was like, no mention of it from teachers, I went to the

56. same school as *Static. So obviously I knew his experience. So I was like, I don't feel I could go

57. to them because I can see that, I know what he went through. So I was like, just feels safer to

58. just try and deal with it by myself instead of potentially, obviously put myself through anything

59. else but because I always felt like, it's bad coming from a peer, but like I was it would feel worse

60. if it was coming from an adult. So just rather than open myself up to that I just tried to deal

61. with it alone. I wanted the adults in my life to support and accept me and I think knowing that

62. was not going to be there and I could experience that er that harm from them felt (.) too er risky.

63. **Carys: Felt better to try and deal with it alone**

64. Glaze: Yeah to self protect. Yeah, yeah, basically (2). It was very (.) so in terms of like, the thing

65. that the guy sent it was really violating. Like erm, I know, er there is a lot of conversations

66. happening about the hypersexualisation of Queer identities, and it felt very much like that,

67. because it was just like, (.) porn sent straight to me. I was like, I don't I don't want to see this,

68. like at all. Erm (2) And just that "Oh, but your bi so you'd like it" "No". And also, because

69. obviously this was sort of at the time I thought I could actually trust them with that

70. information. And then they did that. So I just yet felt very, yeah, very violated, I guess. Yeah,

71. probably be the way I would describe that experience and insulted I guess I was like yeah. It was

72. content I-I er did not want to see and didn't want to engage with and it felt that my whole

73. identity was being considered solely on what er (2) on sexual interests it was very difficult.

74. Where I had trusted only them with this information about being bi and my identity it was hard

75. to know who could I trust. Erm I think sort of as I got older when I was going to, through college,

76. in terms of gender, because I think it was when I was going to college was a time when I was

77. having the most sort of realisations about my gender. Erm but I found it was very hard to sort of
78. erm when I signed up for college, obviously, they had, they said, you could put obviously had to
79. put your legal name, obviously. And they were like, Oh, is there a name you'd rather be called? I
80. remember when I put mine down, they got them the wrong way round. So they had my
81. preferred name as my legal name. And then my birth name as my preferred names. And they all
82. they called my mum to ask like what name who I was not like, I was not ready for her to hear at
83. all yet. Yeah. So then they called my mum, my mum called me, it was a whole ordeal. And then I
84. just ended up just having to stick to just my legal name as the name throughout college. Erm,
85. just because I was obviously I felt sort of like felt that hope. Oh erm, maybe I could be known as
86. my preferred name. But then it just kind of got shut down. Because of, I guess, a mix up which is
87. kind of-f, kind of carelessness, which I think is something sensitive, like a preferred name, things
88. like that. You'd think they'd be more careful with it. Erm yeah, and then I've sort of felt (2)
89. obviously, I was I then felt like if I try to speak to anyone in college about this, are they just
90. got to go straight to my mum who I'm not ready to hear this yet. So yeah, so it was like
91. because of the name mix up, they called my mum and then my mom called me and was like,
92. why have you put this as your legal name? I was like, I didn't I put it, like my preferred name.
93. And then I had to have that whole conversation with her when I wasn't ready for it. Yeah. So
94. it was (.) yeah very hard. Because yeah, my mum, my mum is accepting but it took her a
95. while to get used to it. So it was very, yeah, not-not something I was ready for at the time at
96. all.

97. **Carys: What was your support network at the time?**

98. Glaze: Definitely, my my friends. Er I had some friends online, not as many. Then I have very
99. sort of close knit friends erm in real life. Erm so it was very, it was it was sort of we all were
100. friends first and then sort of every one of us ended up coming out as Queer in some way
101. ((laugh)) So we do just kind of gravitate towards each other somehow. Erm yeah. I did have a
102. few friends online as well that I've made. There was a girl who I ended up sort of like dating

103. long distance as well. Erm and that was. She was really lovely. It was just nice to, it was very
104. nice to see that. You have real life. (2) Like I said, I never experienced, like anyone
105. like physically bullying me or saying anything to my face, it was all just very much
106. like, behind my back or sometimes like online with the case of that guy sending that
107. stuff. Ermm but I felt like I could always go home a space in my room, I always felt
108. like there was, I would, I would always feel like because people would talk about me
109. behind my back. I always felt like the difference when you when you know people
110. are seeing you differently. But I felt I could always go home. And obviously I could
111. talk to my friends. My friends in real life, I could talk to them online. Erm I can go
112. home I can talk to and find people that were more like me, people that would
113. understand. (.) Yeah, even just like seeing other people's like blog posts talking
114. about their experiences. It's just very much. I'm not alone. I feel like Yeah, yeah, not
115. being alone is very important. I think.

116. Carys: So online spaces you were on was that like erm a case of people kind of sharing their
117. experiences then?

118. Glaze: Yeah, people will (.) sharing their experiences. Sort of, I'm very. I'm very like,
119. obviously, they all were online. So I'm very interested in like, fictional things. I'll blog
120. about like all sorts of different shows and stuff that caught my interest, and like
121. fanfiction, and a lot of people will tend to just like write about some of their own
122. experiences, but that in fanfiction, and I could relate to them through that. Er the
123. girl that I mentioned, I ended up dating long distance. We actually ended up meeting
124. because she wrote a fanfiction. She just left like her discord link at the end of it. And
125. she was like, if you ever want to talk about anything, you know, reach out and say,
126. so I was just like, hey, I read your fanfiction. I really enjoyed it. Would you like to talk
127. about stuff. And that was how we like getting in contact in the first instance, that
128. was really lovely. Erm yeah to find people that you sort of, I can talk about my

129. experiences with, they can talk about there's. Even if you don't talk for that long, it's
130. just nice to know that there's someone else, especially when when you are a
131. teenager an adolescent. It's such a tumultuous time anyway, because there's so
132. much in your life that is changing, you are changing so fast. And yeah, finding other
133. people who who are, who are (.) also different, who can feel like oh, it's not just me,
134. there are so many people around the world that are like me, it's just very important.
135. Yeah.

136. **Carys: And is that similar to how you kind of engage online now?**

137. Glaze: Yeah, I think so. It's probably still around the same sort of. I-I-I made it, you
138. know, I have sort of like group chats like people that I, I call them like, my mutual's
139. online, sometimes so like if you both follow each-other back there are mutuals. Then you
140. can talk together, it can be about all sorts of stuff it doesn't even have to necessarily be
141. about their experiences. We could just talk about, like, a game that they like, and
142. we'll talk about it, and we can share, like, just all sorts of thoughts and theories, and
143. then also talk about our actual lives if we want to Yeah, just think while there's
144. there's definitely there's definitely so many, like drawbacks to like the online
145. communities there also positives, without I don't think I feel as confident and secure
146. in my own identity. Without that. Yeah.

147. **Carys: You mentioned drawbacks, what are some of those do you think?**

148. Glaze: So I think, drawbacks. Erm, I think sort of, although it's not so much the case
149. now. Sort of when I was, in my, in my teens, there was very much this, er like, being
150. gay, or being trans was still it was it was still the butt of the joke every so often,
151. you'd see it like every so often in YouTube videos and things like that it was it was
152. still very much being the butt of a joke, just like it was in real life. Which everyone
153. can say, Oh, it's just a joke as much as they like, but at the end of the day your joke is
154. about someone else's identity and it's not a joke to me, because that's me that

155. you're making fun of. Erm and I think sort of now there's become erm (2) sort of a
156. culture online, it's almost almost policing other people's identities like oh, you can't
157. call yourself this unless you've experienced this this and this you can't use this word
158. to describe yourself you have to be this exactly. You have to dress this way you have
159. to experience this exact thing. Erm so and so in particular with sort of like trans
160. people, like something like, oh, but if if you "if you're a trans guy, then why would
161. you still like to wear a skirt?" And I'm like, "because skirts are pretty" like, no one
162. would question my gender, if I was a cis man wearing a skirt, it would just be
163. because skirts are cool but now it's like, Oh, are you. Are you, are not really trans
164. then? Are you actually just faking? It's like, No, I just like skirts, you know? Erm yeah,
165. policing, just just this this sort of idea that you have to sort of tick every box in a
166. checklist in order to actually like, call yourself how you feel to use a label that fits
167. your identity. Erm which is. Yeah,

168. **Carys: Do you think this sense of policing has become er more so recently?**

169. Glaze: Yeah, I think has increased more so for sure. So I can't figure out why that is.
170. I've just noticed it grow sort of over the past five years in particular. Erm, there's,
171. yeah, just this very much. I think some people have kind of learned buzzwords that
172. they just kind of like to throw into a conversation as if that's kind of like, they'll sort
173. of learn, oh, this is problematic, but just kind of sort of just like, word problematic
174. thing. And it's like, but there's so much. I think the internet has sometimes lost its
175. nuance, and especially in exploring identities, like, sometimes, like if people say, (2)
176. like oh, by obviously, reclaiming the word Queer, some people are really against
177. that, which I understand, I completely understand that if you have been insulted, or
178. had, you know, the word Queer thrown at you as a slur, I could totally understand
179. why you wouldn't want to use that for yourself. But you can't stop other people
180. from using that if they were to reclaim that word to use as their identity. Yeah. It's

181. this sense of just yeah like just policing other people's identities when it doesn't
182. concern you if it's not you is the thing. Yeah. Yeah, stuff like that. Obviously, going
183. into the terms online. I think what I've seen sort of using buzzwords is terms of the
184. words people are throwing in and using, a lot of there's so many I think, was just like
185. easy things. You can just say, Oh, this is problematic. And so then people can just
186. learn those words and sort of word things in a way that can almost make them
187. sound like they're being. (2) I don't know, I don't know how to put it. (2) Like,
188. sometimes people say, oh, it's, they often try to say about men trying to invade
189. women's to invade women's spaces. When it's not, it's that they are trans women,
190. they are women. Erm it's sort of, it's like creating this sense of fear, I guess, which is
191. it's yeah, it's basically fear mongering for people that it's like, trans women aren't
192. going into women's bathrooms to try and assault anyone that they just need to pee
193. like this ((laugh)) This again, vice versa for trans men like it's just we just (.) we just
194. want to pee ((laugh)). Yeah. Which is it has gotten really far like I will see people in
195. Parliament, trying to. There was people talking about literally just like, there was
196. people in parliament trying to talk about having a non binary option for official
197. documents, so passports and stuff, but all sort of the things that were getting cited
198. er, by politicians were TERF points that I've seen talking online, again, going into
199. things like oh, it's just men invading women's spaces, quotation marks. And it's like
200. that, it's it's very saddening to me to see the sort of this terminology that has just
201. spread folks so far there is now being put into laws and bills and affecting people's
202. lives. Yeah, it is. It is a scary, it's a scary thing to witness. I think (.) . Erm just seeing
203. how sort of it's gotten to the stage where bills might be passed, so it could even like,
204. limit us further. And it's yeah, just scary. Yeah. It can feel like my identity er just be existing
205. as my self in my Queer identity particularly as a trans man that I am offending people by just
206. existing. There is so much fear and discussions led by TERFs that er, that, Trans people are a

207. threat that we are a danger to people. Like. It is scary and it is difficult to be myself often. I
208. think the spaces that, as you know recently there has been a surge and a greater presence of
209. TERFs and conversations, well er hate and discrimination towards the trans community
210. online in spaces that were at time or that were previously spaces that were safe that I could
211. explore my identity and my open in safely. [Yeah [But I do I think it very much it
212. varies from platform to platform with how much of a safe space online is. So I've
213. gotten rid of quite a bit of social media, sort of, I think it was like last year, I got rid
214. of like, Twitter and Instagram. Erm just because, I was I think especially Twitter, I see
215. TERFs sort of everywhere on Twitter, and it was so unavoidable to get rid of I
216. remember the I think one of the last straws for me was it was a, a bank for pride
217. month had just said something about, like, being able to use preferred pronouns or
218. something when you make an account, and it was just everywhere, we're just
219. people reacting as if this was like the worst thing to happen to the world. And I'm (.)
220. like, if like, it doesn't affect you in any way. Like, it's just like, if if you don't differ
221. your pronouns, it doesn't affect you. Er but it was just I was just seeing so much to
222. transphobia online, that I couldn't get away from it, I was just like, No, I'm just gonna
223. get rid of Twitter entirely. Whereas now the only sort of the sort social media that
224. I'm still active on, again, is still Tumblr, just because it's, I find it a lot easier to just
225. sort of block things out block certain tags. So I can block, I can blacklist certain words
226. so that if they're on a post, it will just filter out the post, and it will say this post
227. features this word, do you want to view it? Or do you just want to scroll past?
228. Carys: oh that's clever
229. Glaze: Yeah. So that's why I've stuck to it so much, because I can just like I have, I
230. have, like, JK Rowling just blacklisted? Because if I'm not in the mood to see
231. someone talk about it, then I don't have to. So that's why I've stopped because that
232. is probably the one place where I found I can still curate my own, I guess my own

233. internet experience, I'm still able to create their own space for myself. But this is
234. very sad for me. So thinking about Harry Potter and J.K.Rowling, it was because it
235. was something that I grew up on it was because my mum also really loves Harry
236. Potter. So it was something that we could really bond about. Harry Potter was such a
237. constant source of support for me when I was growing up, particularly through dark times it
238. was my comfort. It is just a book yeah, but, it-it was a real erm it allowed me to feel safe and
239. comforted. The precise of the story is obviously about a child that doesn't fit in, you know
240. everyone there is different, they are all have these differences and challenges but there is a
241. place for them everywhere, you know with each of the houses and it allowed me to consider
242. those differences as strengths and that I had value or that there is value in being different. I
243. saw it in a way as being magic as having that magic. And also, whereas now
244. my mum knows, like she does, I know you don't like Harry Potter anymore, like,
245. I won't bring it up around you anymore. Which is appreciated, because sometimes I
246. just don't really want to hear on it anymore. But it's, it's almost it's like almost a
247. sense of loss. Because it was such I got so invested in Harry Potter, I was like,
248. completely, completely obsessed with such a long part of my life. Erm and now it's
249. it. Yeah, it's really sad to kind of, I guess, lose that almost. Because I don't feel
250. comfortable associating with it anymore. When for a while, it was definitely a part of
251. my identity. It was like I use it, like the amount of like, merch that I had or was like, I
252. was like, oh, yeah, I'm definitely a *House I had like, bags. I had like hats and
253. scarves. And now I'm just like, I don't want to see any of it anymore. Which is sad.
254. Yeah. Yeah, but like, I have, I have no other like, no problem with like other people
255. enjoying it. I So long as like, they don't actually agree with JK Rowling themselves,
256. then I have no problem with it. It's just for me personally, I can't. I just can't
257. I think without that, without my space and group that I have created online, I think
258. without that I don't think I just probably would be staying clear of the Internet

259. altogether. And I'll look up what I want to see that will be gone. So I'm very glad that
260. I'm able to curate again again that community for myself, and obviously, like, I don't
261. want to try to like (.) Erm, I'm trying to think of the word. I don't know if you've
262. heard the term like circle jerk, ((Shakes Head)) No, so. So it's a term sort of used for
263. communities that can sometimes shut themselves off. And so one sort of point of
264. view kind of gets sort of passed around and passed around because they're not erm
265. seeing other points of views. They can kind of get more extremist as they sort of like
266. Carys: [Like an echo Chamber?
267. Glaze: Yeah, that's, that's that's probably the best the better term for it [No [But
268. yeah, so I tried to make sure that I'm not putting myself in an echo chamber also,
269. you know, if I see like, sort of, if I see like a term that I don't recognise I will try to
270. take the time to look through what people have said about it their own experiences
271. and evaluate for myself what I think is still still very important for me. To be
272. able to create my own space that I yeah, that again, I have control over and
273. Carys: Do you feel like the ability to control your space online is easier the more
274. understanding you have in your identity then?
275. Glaze Yeah, (2) Yeah (.) I think so. Yeah, I think sort of, I think partially, I think sort of
276. when I was in college, erm I was and so I was in a GSA, so a Gender Sexuality
277. Alliance. Erm, and while we did have an adult staff member, they weren't very
278. present a lot of the time. And I think we could have done, er we could have done
279. with, we could have definitely benefited from a moderation in that GSA, because I
280. think there were some views. Erm again, sort of what I was saying about sort of, like
281. policing of people's identities, there was some of that in that group from other
282. people there. Which I do think actually sort of it set me back a bit in feeling secure in
283. my identity at the time, because I was sort of like, oh, I don't feel this way I don't.
284. Erm I don't necessarily relate to this experience. And it was very much sort of about

285. to be pushed, like you had to do this, you have to feel this way in order to be who
286. you thought you are. Erm and sort of because I, because I was experiencing in that in
287. real life. It was sort of I was going back and sort of seeing some of that online, I
288. think, oh, is this how it's supposed to be? Erm and it took me quite a while, a couple
289. years after to realise Oh, no, actually, I like, explore, I guess, it's fine for me to not
290. adhere to this very strict regimen of things you have to be [Yeah. And sort of as I
291. became more secure in that I was, it was a lot easier for me to open myself up to
292. other people's, like, other people's experiences and things like that, because, like,
293. different from mine, but it's still similar, because, like, Queer people are different.
294. And so like, no one is going to have the exact same experience. But we all have the
295. experience of being Queer, if that makes sense? Yeah, (2) so it's just being able to
296. open myself up to experiences that can be vastly different from mine. But you can,
297. you can still find common ground. Yeah, I really like that.

298. Carys: Is that always been something that's always felt important to you, finding that
299. common ground with others?

300. Glaze: Yeah, definitely. I think sometimes I can see kind of this, like, some in-fighting
301. I can sometimes see around, I tried to stay away from that as much as possible.

302. Carys: What do you mean by that sorry?

303. Glaze: Erm, I think yeah, some of like that, and sometimes. (2) I don't know how to, I'm
304. trying to think of specific a specific example. Erm that's say erm, sometimes I've seen so like
305. people who are only gay, maybe saying, like, excluding people who are bi saying, "Oh"
306. I've seen this sometimes more. With I don't know, sort of like, they'll say, "Oh, but because
307. you're bi, you can just stay someone of the opposite gender anyway. And so you don't have
308. the same experiences we do". It's like. And they'll say, "Oh, if someone sees you on the
309. street holding hands to your partner, and there the opposite gender, you'll be absolutely
310. fine." It's like yeah, but only in that case, like, you're still I'm still bi sort of sort of like

311. infighting in between, like different identities, I try to stay away from that as much as
312. possible. Because at the end of the day, we are all Queer, we are all like, no one who is
313. homophobic is going to accept you more just because you reject like five people or
314. whatever. You know, like no one is like trying to shut down other members of your
315. community isn't gonna, it's not gonna make homophobic people treat you any better. At the
316. end of the day, you are still what they don't like. Erm I yeah, so I think it's just very
317. important for us to still have the community that sticks together amongst everything. Yeah.
318. I think we need for everyone to feel safe, that is what I would want for everyone to be able
319. to feel safe. Also like er acceptance. Like if I'd been able to know sort of the words for, like,
320. identities to be open to me, that it would just find things a lot easier when I was kind of
321. figuring figure myself out because trying to figure yourself out when you're a teenager is
322. hard already. Erm (.) yeah, so I think if I was just that acceptance has been openly available.
323. If I had that, you know, if I could feel comfortable with the knowledge that if I came out, I
324. would be accepted, then it would just feel so much better.

325. **Carys: Did you receive that sense of acceptance anywhere?**

326. Glaze: Yeah, yeah, it was online. It was receiving that acceptance on online that made me
327. feel like And was that these are people like me. And this is where I feel safe yeah. But I don't
328. think the adults around me at the time understand the importance to me of being online er
329. I-I- this was the only space I did feel safe. So my Mum was very against me talking to people
330. online which I do understand from a safety standpoint, but from the point where I was when
331. I got older. I was like I am old enough to know Internet safety. I'm not going to be giving
332. stranger my address or anything like that erm. (.) so I-I understand why she was worried, I
333. was just like (.) there are people who will accept me and I'm not getting that anywhere else
334. so I-I need to get it somewhere, yeah. I think towards, when I was at the tail end of college I
335. think she had warmed up to it more erm and then I moved out only about a month and a bit
336. after I'd left college ((laugh) so erm, you know when I live on my own she's like you live on

337. your own you can do what you want. Erm so it's fair. I think it could've helped if college had
338. understood that online community. With-with college, it's difficulty because throughout my
339. second year of college, my attendance got patchy for many different reasons so they were
340. differently trying to do their best to support me where they could. Erm yeah I think, if there
341. was that more, I guess obviously because a lot of young people now do spend a lot of their
342. time online, and will get a lot of their information from online. So I think if adults are more
343. aware (.) of sort of what's going on, online if they see what's happening then they are likely
344. to have a much better understanding of what young people are experiencing in their
345. everyday lives. Erm Yeah. I'm trying to think and my brain is throwing a blank (3). That sense
346. of knowing I wasn't alone was so important. So if staff and teachers understood that. Even
347. when you have erm, you know we called it PSHE in school erm, so yeah I can't remember the
348. anagram stood for now but it was like your social and stuff. I think even if we had more
349. information of like people who are LGBT and Queer identities there, so people who are
350. young, Queer and trying to figure themselves out it's there. You know like I said I didn't even
351. know that bisexual was an option until I saw it online. So If I'd knew it was an option I'd of
352. seen it and thought 'Oh that's me!' like-Like I'm not weird or broken for not being one or the
353. other. There are people like me, I think, I think even if was yeah like in the curriculum of like
354. social classes, just to, just to know that the option is there and because it's being talked
355. about and taught you can like yeah I can feel safe here. You know having people who are
356. more knowledgeable in school to support Queer youth, there was no one with any
357. knowledge or understanding in my school. I am seeing more and more young people are
358. identifying as Queer, you know as times have changed it has become more accepted erm
359. they are feeling more able to come out at a younger age and I just think yeah the support.
360. Even if you don't necessarily reach out for it, knowing that it is there if you do want it or
361. need it, is hugely needed.

362. **Carys: Honestly, thank you so much, it is so hugely appreciated. I've loved hearing about**

363. your experiences and your story, thank you so much for sharing it with me and for trusting
364. me with it.
365. Glaze: Thank you, yeah.
366. Carys: Is there anything else that you'd like to chat about or anything we've missed?
367. Glaze: I don't think so.

Appendix K – Sample of analysed transcript

<p>fucking yazhoo left. I was erm glad though like I think before I was thinking of like er telling a more sound teacher but glad I didn't. I had to go and see the safeguarding office and then erm that was it. I didn't want to go to school after that. So this must have been like end of year 10 at this point. My auntie lives in *area and I just stayed with her the whole summer between year 10 and year 11 didn't see no one. I erm, I think this was most amount of time I spend online at this point. I wanted to hide, I wasn't ready for everyone to know I was gay (.) or see my dick ((laughs)) sorry. I just it was really difficult. I started like gaming and just chatting to people over the summer, I didn't really sleep or eat I was not looking after myself but. It was like the same people I'd game with, and we'd chat and they become the only people I'd talk to. Sometimes I'd just shit talk in the games for a laugh but I actually become I relied on these people, I think here was the first time in my life where I erm, where I could be me. I didn't care enough to try and fit in and I could be me, whoever that was. But I think then when (.) summer ended it was quite</p>	<p>I wonder if Alex felt this lack of understanding for punching the window was because of who the images were sent to?</p> <p>'had to go' – lack of agency</p> <p>Despite wanting support, the impact of this interaction confirmed to Alex he was right not to seek support strikes me. I wonder if the lack of acceptance/support felt worse from adults he typically should be able to trust?</p> <p>Hiding/ isolation</p> <p>The images being shared feels secondary to the feelings Alex has around being outed. That sense of not having control or agency over the information others know about him perhaps?</p> <p>Connection (almost as though Alex was creating a sense of community/ belonging?)</p> <p>A powerful statement, I wonder what this felt like for Alex? Being present in a space where he felt that he could be him? What did being 'him' feel like, was there perhaps an importance on the acknowledgement that he could be open I wonder? Or a need for there to be flexibility/ exploration in who 'he was'?</p>
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a shock like erm coming back and knowing I'd have to face everyone. I just thought like everyone will still be talking about it. At the start of year 11, I was meant to start but I think I made myself sick with how erm like stressed out I was feeling. My mum forced me to go the second week, school were calling by and that. I went early as I had to meet with my head of year as I'd missed the first week, they rung and had a go saying like this is the most important year of life, no time for petty feuds is what they said. No one got it. When I got there though, like the lads just pretended not to know me. Like it was as if they didn't care but they didn't want to know me. It hurt (.).

Carys: It being described as a petty feud, felt like no one understood.

Alex: Yeah. But like some of the girls who I'd been like friendly with before, where like intense ((laughs)), Ellie was obsessed with having a gay friend I swear. I didn't even realise we were friends. She just wanted to know what the lads said about her and being on snap, she put a pride flag on I swear down everything ((laughs)). "This is best friend Valentina, she's

Lack of control? 'have to face everyone' Did Alex want to be back in the same environment?

Voice of stress

Lack of agency/control 'forced me'

Does this feel central to Alex's narrative? Another example of an adult's response/communication dismissing the impact/extent of Alex's experiences (squinny response to the punching and then this?)

Pretence/ isolation

Voice of hurt

Alex's use of the phrase 'I swear' is interesting, does he perhaps want to ensure that I believe his narrative? Legitimacy in emphasising the 'truth'?

The 'obsession' with having a gay friend is interesting here, I wonder how it felt from an explicit picture being shared to your sexuality being presumed? How did Alex feel about being 'gay' being central here?

an ally. Talk Valentina" (American accent) You know that?

Carys: "Ally" (American accent) ((laughs)) yeah, I know the video you mean.

Alex: ((laughs)) Yes ((laughs)). So, er yeah school had called mum to tell her what had happened, and she had agreed not to tell dad so like there me thinking one of these is gonna talk and my dad will hear. I but I was pretty erm just like I wanted to chill with them, and have friends. I tried to (inaudible) at break and everyone just went and played wallsey round the corner felt like the kid no one want to play tag with ((laugh)). But nah like it was hard, I just tried to become this version of me that meant erm the girls wouldn't ditch me. I was like I was a completely different Alex to who I was a year ago. We had this like erm, like outside building for anyone that was like always in trouble or needed like extra help. One of the girls I was friends with now, was friends with someone in there and we started to chill. She had lots of like older friends but also went to like loads of LGBT events and things and clubs and I'd go with her, and like it was so

Shared understanding/experience of a viral video "you know that"? I wonder what Alex's response would have been had I not of been familiar with it? Did this strengthen the rapport I wonder?

Difficulty

Change/transition

The relationships that Alex is creating, perhaps?

different to the youth club like everyone was so like sound and like understood what I'd erm what I was going. I can't really explain it, but it was like the things what I'd gotten like the online groups but like real and more real for like me like erm I could be the real me. So yeah, er the girl she was bi, and it was the first time I was like oh wait I think that's me. Like I just thought that as I did erm did like guys that it had to mean I was gay. But it was weird like I was in like groups and that with like erm LGBTQ but it I don't know it wasn't like actually like I don't remember anyone talking about it. I had heard the term but not thought about it. As we were spending like more and more time together, we just like got on so well and then(.) begun like dating you know. The reaction from everyone else was bad, the girls were friends with me literally just because they thought I was gay. Nikita did not care about what anyone thought, but I'm not like that I think I was still feeling like erm isolated and just like I don't know, had she of not been so like not caring like I wouldn't of coped.

Repetition, emphasis placed on being the real me, this sense of the 'real me' appears to fluctuate and change throughout the narrative. Access to a space Alex felt he could be true feels fundamental to his identity? The transition to access to a space that wasn't virtual where he could be the 'real' him. What felt 'real' I wonder? Was there a sense that not being direct or open about all aspects of his identity felt to him as though he wasn't being 'real'?

Discovery

Having a term/label that Alex felt like it 'fitted' appears important.

How did this feel for Alex? Feels like a repeated experience where the gender of a partner receives a 'bad' reaction.

Voice of isolation

Support (comfort and care from Nikita)

