

Queer Youth, Facebook and Faith: Facebook

Methodologies and Online Identities

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Abstract

'Making space for queer-identifying religious youth'² (2011-2013) is an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded project, which seeks to shed light on youth cultures, queer community and religiosity. Whilst non-heterosexuality is often associated with secularism, and some sources cast religion as *automatically* negative or harmful to the realisation of LGBT identity (or 'coming out'), we explore how queer Christian youth negotiate sexual-religious identities. There is a dearth of studies on queer religious youth, yet an emerging and continuing interest in the role of digital technologies for the identities of young people. Based on interviews with 38 LGBT, 'religious' young people, this article examines Facebook, as well as wider social networking sites and the online environment and communities. Engaging with the key concept of 'online embodiment' (Farquhar 2012), this article takes a closer analysis of embodiment, emotion and temporality to approach the role of Facebook in the lives of queer religious youth. Further, it explores the methodological dilemmas evoked by the presence of Facebook in qualitative research with specific groups of young people.

Keywords

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Introduction

The lives of young people are increasingly played out online and young LGBT Christians are no different. Scholars have argued that the internet can offer safe spaces particularly for people of counter-normative sexualities to construct an identity, forge connections and articulate voices otherwise subjugated in some offline spaces. We explore the complexities of 'coming out' as LGBT and/or religious, and question how Facebook 'made space' to construct an identity, forge connections and articulate voices otherwise subjugated in some offline spaces. Furthermore, we engage with a wider analysis of emotion, embodiment and temporality in order to assess the opportunities afforded by (dis)embodied online profiles and spaces to queer³ religious youth. Our approach takes a closer look at the role of (dis)embodiment in the construction of identities through online technology, developing the earlier scholarly studies of Facebook to incorporate, and problematise, more recent theories on 'online embodiment' (Farquhar 2012).

A substantial body of work on LGBT lives entirely disregards religious belief or refers to such (dis)associations as negative, harmful or superficial (Jordan, 2011; Gross and

³ Contestations over the meanings of 'queer', deployed variously as an (anti)identity category, exist. The authors, as with respondents, have used this as an umbrella term to encompass and stretch 'LGBT', and to highlight non-normative spaces and subjects. Notably, literature has queried the centrality of visibility and 'coming out': research has shown that visibility may be privilege not readily available to, for example, working-class lesbian women (Taylor, 2007; 2009). 'Coming out' is not always an empowering or liberating act; this paradigm can create distance between 'out' and 'closeted' LGBT subjects, where the latter are represented as repressed individuals, often located geographically, foregrounding a 'West and the rest' linear model of coming out from repression to liberation. Such debates continue in queer/sexualities/feminist studies (e.g. see Taylor, Hines and Casey, 2010).

Yip, 2010; Kubicek et al, 2009; Yip, 1997). Simultaneously, with regard to 'making space' for non-heterosexuality in religion, various Christian denominations have articulated different perspectives, which are enormously complicated and contrary (Hunt 2009). 'Youth' is also a contested term and often young adults' life experiences and priorities are placed at odds with the rigidity and structuredness that religion seems to impose and demand. Therefore, in such associations, the relationship between religion and queer youth is at best tenuous and negligible. Nonetheless, research has incontrovertibly shown that religious faith and connections do matter for many young adults, significantly informing the construction of their biographical narratives and strategic life-planning (e.g. Collins-Mayo and Dandelion 2010, Smith and Snell 2009). Whilst non-heterosexuality is often associated with secularism, this study works against this dominant discourse by exploring the experiences of young LGBT people's connections with Christianity. Rather than assume that sexuality and religion – and in our case Christianity – are separate and divergent paths, we explore how they might mutually and complexly construct one another.

We outline our (online) methods, exploring the importance of Facebook in recruiting queer religious youth as project participants, with researchers creating an online presence via the project's website <http://queerreligiousyouth.wordpress.com/>, and a closed Facebook group. The lingering virtual 'connections' this left behind when respondents 'friended' us, raised interesting methodological questions about the online private, personal and embodied life of researchers.

'Making space for queer-identifying religious youth': Rationale and Methods

Over the course of the fieldwork for the project (2011-2013) we recruited 38 respondents across 3 sites: Newcastle, Manchester, and London. Most of the participants considered themselves to be white British, with only a few identifying as white Other such as Greek Cypriot (1 interviewee), Spanish (1), and Italian (1). In terms of sex and gender identity: 19 participants identified as female, 15 as male, 2 as gender-queer, 1 as gender-queer and transgender, and 1 as transsexual female-to-male. The sexual identity of participants can be broadly categorised as gay (15 respondents), lesbian (13), bisexual (5), queer (4), and asexual (1). Five participants have disabilities (two used electronic wheelchairs; one had Asperger's Syndrome and used walking sticks; one participant was deaf and one claimed Disability Living Allowance because of their specific disabilities).

Most participants identified with the denomination of their church: Church of England (6 participants), Methodist (3), Catholic (2), Quaker (2), Charismatic (1), Ecumenical (1), and Evangelical (1). Two participants identified as Unitarian but with Pagan and Buddhist leanings. Where churches were non-denominational, like the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) (15 participants), some participants also identified with the denomination within which they had been brought up (Church of England, 3 participants; Catholic, 2; Greek Orthodox, 1; and Methodist, 1). Five other participants did not attend a church, attended a non-denominational church (other than MCC), did not know or did not identify with the denomination of their church.

For the purposes of this project, young people were broadly defined as under-35 years, with the youngest respondent being 17 and the oldest being 34 years old (the mean age of respondents was 24 years old). In line with comparable youth studies (Kubicek et al 2009; Yip et al 2011), our first call for LGBT Christians to participate in

the project defined 'young' adults as 16 to 24 years of age. The same slippages when defining young adults can be seen in youth studies: Valentine et al. (2003: 481) recognise that even when young people leave the family home it 'continues to be the site through which many of their individual biographies and expectations are routed' beyond the 'tidy' age of 24.

'Youth' can signify a very wide age range, and the experiences and meanings associated with it are socially constituted, varying both cross-culturally and historically. Though culturally varied, young adulthood is a significant point in the life course, and maps a period of intense and increasingly uneven and fragmented transition. Youth is often characterised by experimentation, exploration and change, representing a stage in the life-course that involves intense identity work in order to develop an 'inner voice' and ontological anchor. By increasing the upper age range of our participants to 35 we acknowledged this complexity in defining 'youth' and the significance of this (expanding) point in the life-course.

The project adopted a mixed-method research design, consisting of individual face-to-face interviews, diaries, and a mapping exercise. The interviews lasted between one and two hours and were conducted in participants' homes, a church, a cathedral, a youth centre, universities, cafes, and through one Skype interview. Interviews were semi-structured, exploring the family, education, work, leisure, relationships and identity, religion, and the imagined future.⁴

Each participant was also invited to keep a diary for one month after the interview, to record their reflections on their everyday life and events and thoughts relating to the

⁴ The interviews were then transcribed and coded in Atlas.ti and we used approximately 50 codes based on an analysis of the transcripts to draw out common themes discussed by participants.

interview themes; only minimal guidelines were provided, with some examples of issues pertaining to religion and sexuality given but participants left to tell their story in their own way. Participants were asked to complete a mind-map, which was either done at a small group meeting, with the researcher, following the interview, or completed alone and later returned. The brief was to think about spaces inhabited on a day-to-day basis and felt (un)comfortable in terms of religious and sexual identities, which also necessitated researcher consideration.

Such considerations introduced some methodological dilemmas relating to the role of Facebook in qualitative research with young people, for whom communication is increasingly geared towards this medium, and whose relationships online have become normalised. Here, it is useful to draw on a quote from one of the slightly older participants in the project who expresses difficulty in the 'unhealthy' lack of control that can be associated with Facebook:

I've been using Facebook for a couple of years now but I find it very strange and baffling still but I meet people that way too..... Maurice [a younger associate] has a very different attitude to me with it because he'll talk to someone for two minutes and they'll be his friend on Facebook, whereas I am more circumspect. My two managers at work were friends on Facebook then I thought, 'Hang on, this is too weird, I don't want my managers knowing what I'm doing 24 hours a day' and so I had to delete them. I felt there was an element of control there that wasn't healthy (Thomas 34, Manchester)

Thomas has reservations about allowing new 'friends' to access his profile. This reluctance is particularly the case with Facebook friends with whom he was in professional relationships, and indeed where there may be seen to be hierarchical power dynamics, such as his managers in his workplace. Similarly, the research process during the fieldwork for 'making space for queer-identifying religious youth' evoked parallel concerns as young participants 'befriended' researchers through their own personal Facebook sites.

The 'transition to friendship' (Oakley 1981) between the researcher and researched is not an original dilemma for qualitative researchers, and has long been a concern for feminist methodologies. Researchers have to 'live through and manage relationships which are simultaneously personal, emotional, physical and intellectual' Mason (2002: 95); these difficult dilemmas can be particularly experienced by researchers who adopt more intimate practices, where participants can be at risk of manipulation or feel obliged to reveal uncomfortable information. The (de)friending of research participants on Facebook has led to a new set of methodological dilemmas (Hall 2009):

The introduction of social networking websites into the research context presents a new (technological) challenge for ethnographers in the face of an 'old' or traditional problem: of developing friendships with participants, sharing personal information and emersion into the field (Hall 2009: 266).

Whilst many of the participants saw disclosure of all aspects of their identity online as a positive step, the use of social networking sites raised interesting methodological questions about the online private and public life of researchers. As researchers, our

own online identities and public profiles can 'announce' us before we arrive in the field, at times 'outing' our own sexuality or religious affiliation to participants pre-interview. In addition, the 'private' online profiles of researchers can become part of the research process, particularly where the use of an existing profile adds legitimacy to the project's call for participants and where young people request to be 'friends' post-project involvement. Nicola (21, Newcastle) sent a 'friend request' on Facebook when finalising the details of the first meeting. Mindful of the sensitive questions posed in interview, the researcher accepted this request in the hope that an online potted history of her private life would provide reassurances about her participation in the project (the 'researched' becoming the 'researcher'). Whilst Nicola was an unobtrusive 'friend', she was subsequently 'deleted' (after the fieldwork stage), restoring the researcher's preferred reservations of her profile for 'private' rather than work communications.

The 'de-friending' of this young research participant upon completion of the empirical fieldwork was a decision that troubled the researchers working on the project. We struggled to reconcile the process of (dis)engaging (Lewis, 2009), particularly in light of the difficult and traumatic experiences spoken about (Reavey, 2011), with the lingering virtual 'connections' these online tools created. The need to identify a point where private lives and the research process remains separate has already been discussed by researchers who question the appropriate level of (de)attachment necessary when maintaining friendships with participants (Hall 2009). Here, Hall argues that current frameworks for ethical guidelines remain too formalised in their approach to ethnographic research, which fails to take into account the reciprocal nature of interactions between the participant and the researcher. Having given their time, energy and personal information to the project throughout the research process,

Hall argues that it would then be 'unethical to ignore communication from them' (the participants) after the research process had been completed. This ethical dilemma points to the potentially exploitative nature of a friendship that is formed for the primary purpose of data collection, but which dissolves thereafter as the researcher loses interest.

With regard to the project with queer religious youth, it seemed similarly uncomfortable to ask them to expose at times highly conflicting or painful identities at a time of significant transition, yet for our identities to remain invisible. Further dilemmas emerged when issues of confidentiality came into play; the personal online profiles of the participants would then become visible to the researcher's personal contacts. In order to adhere to ethical guidelines of the project, it was necessary to uphold the strict issues of confidentiality and protection of participants. Nevertheless, befriending and 'de-friending' on personal Facebook sites evoked significant dilemmas for how researchers working with young people then exit the field.

Digital methodologies are becoming increasingly central in youth-centred research projects (McDermott and Roen 2012). Online tools to access this 'virtual field', such as the project's website and Facebook group, were used for recruitment purposes and allowed participants to interact with the project and other respondents beyond the interview stage. This interaction meant participants were able to post links and document their views and experiences on a host of issues pertaining to their religion and sexuality. This included links to their own blogs, and provided a form for sometimes quite heated debates about coming-out in church, identity categories and

census returns⁵, and the language of homophobia. Thus, whilst respondents were already active in the 'blogosphere' and on social media, the virtual space created by the project (Facebook group and website) to recruit and communicate with participants continued to be used by respondents to interact with each other and promote their own views on their intersecting identities beyond their involvement with the project. The 'new media' in our research became an unforeseen platform for our participants, recognising that "everyday life' for much of the world is becoming increasingly technologically mediated' (Murthy 2008: 849).

'Coming out' as queer and religious online: negotiating (dis)embodied identities: 'I just said it on Facebook, typed in 'I'm gay' and I hit 'enter'

The emergence of Facebook as a scholarly concern quickly identified this medium of social communication as a tool for identity construction. Interestingly, these earlier studies make a distinction between the corporeal presence of the body in localised, face-to-face social encounters and interactions and the disembodied online profile, where new opportunities for claiming identities are facilitated by virtual forums free of the 'limitations' of embodiment. Referring to Facebook in particular, Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin (2008: 1817) claim 'the combination of disembodiment and anonymity creates a technologically mediated environment in which a new mode of identity production emerges'. So, how are the identities of queer religious youth are

⁵ Tom (20, Manchester) identifies as transgender (female to male) and reflected at length about the difficulties the 2011 Census for England and Wales posed in its confusion of sex and gender ('They only had a sex category, not gender, and when i [sic] asked them about it they were at first confused and then basically told me to write my gender, which means they had confused sex with gender.')

constructed, negotiated and presented through online social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as other forms of virtual communication such as Skype? Here we focus on the 'coming out' or 'outing' of queer religious youth through such online technology, and discuss the complex opportunities provided by Facebook to facilitate the transition from 'private' to 'public' identities. In doing so, this approach takes a closer look at the role of (dis)embodiment in the construction of identities through online technology, developing the earlier scholarly studies of Facebook to incorporate more recent theories on 'online embodiment' (Farquhar 2012). A key element of constructing online identities is the profiling of identities on Facebook. Profiling key characteristics of the self, such as religious or political views, preferences in music or film, membership to social groups, sexual orientation and relationship status is central to what Farquhar (2012: 2) terms 'online embodiment':

Facebook profiles can be thought of as an online embodiment of real persons using the site. The term 'embodiment' refers in this work to the individual's representative in a computer-mediated interaction.....The profiles have conversations with each other; when we talk to someone online, we are talking to his or her profile.....In the virtual world of Facebook, this embodiment is present even when the Face booker signs off. Other users can still interact with it.

The concept of 'online embodiment' is a key point of engagement, building on and problematising online embodiment is an important development for the role of Facebook in the case study of queer religious youth.

Participants in our study identified, sometimes awkwardly, as both Christian and queer, and here their Facebook profiles were of significant importance. The 'About' page on Facebook was perceived as a culmination of key characteristics which were seen as constructing a particular public and personal persona. Many participants suggested that religious views and 'Interested in' (ie men, women, men and women) were, in conjunction with photographs and images of the self, equally important in the construction of their embodied identities online. There is also a Facebook feature that allows users to write a description of themselves in their own words and to express characteristics of themselves. Georgina highlights the immediate effect of disclosing information about her religion and bisexuality:

Like say on Facebook or something, you've got a little box to fill in a brief description of you, their religious views and sexual orientation going to go in there definitely. The bisexual thing, the Christian thing, are definitely going to be in 200 words or less to write it down. But then so will the fact that I have brown hair; I'm a brunette, I'm a woman, I'm bisexual, they're not more important than each other (Georgina, 20, London).

Interestingly, Georgina discusses her Christian and sexual identities as being as integral to her Facebook profile as her gender (a woman), and the more visual embodied features such as hair colour. In describing herself (brunette woman) she thus strongly claims that her queer and religious identities are not more or less important than these other foundations. In constructing an identity in less than 200 words, Georgina asserts that her bisexuality and Christianity are definitely 'going to go in there', indicating the vehemence of her desire to express the balance and

reconciliation of these identities as central to her profile. The seduction of the Facebook profile is that it conveys an instant display of the self, and therefore key markers - such as image - become immediately registered by the viewer alongside religion, sexuality and other such typologies. In other parts of Georgina's interview, it is clear that being Christian and queer is more important to her than her hair colour. It seems that there are certain ways that marking the self both online and offline become disjointed; in an interview there is more 'space' (over 200 words and no 'little box') and time to detail complex interplays of identity matters beyond the Facebook profile which is designed to register immediate affects.

Not all queer religious youth had (yet) adopted such an approach to their profile. Helen (20, Newcastle) used her project mind map to explore the everyday spaces where she is 'out', for example in her college, some select Christian groups, certain online forums and the student union society. In other spaces, such as her regular church, this had remained hidden. Similarly, Helen had not disclosed her sexuality to her parents: her Facebook profile and online embodiment was a space in which, despite her religious identity and views being present, her sexuality remained omitted. Be that as it may, coming out to online networks was viewed as an important milestone by some participants such as Helen, who saw 'updating' the sexual preference of their online identity to be the culmination of this process. Where Helen is only 'out' as bisexual to a select group of people, her 'eventual end goal' on her mind map is to update her Facebook profile with 'Interested in: Men and Women'⁶.

⁶ One of the key features on the Facebook Profile is to tick a box which indicates your sexual interest in 'Men', 'Women', 'Men and Women'. If selected, this information appears on the Facebook profile page, If not selected, this information remains blank.

The perception of coming out online as the final stage of this transitional process demonstrates the central significance of Facebook profiling in the lives of the young people in our study. Publically profiling both 'Religious views' together with 'Interested in' is key to the construction of the embodied, online self, without which the profile remains partially incomplete. How queer religious youth manage this reconciliation is played out through this online embodiment (Farquhar 2012). For example, when Isabelle discusses her sexuality as *not* part of her identity 'in any way', she immediately supports this claim by referring to the non-appearance on her Facebook profile:

It's not part of my identity in any way; in Facebook I don't put that I'm 'interested in...' (Isabelle 18 Manchester).

It appears that for Isabelle and other queer religious youth, in order to truly publically live through potentially conflicting identities, this must be reflected by the online embodiment in Facebook. This is somewhat unsurprising seeing as Facebook has been theorised to epitomise the ultimate identity formation⁷ and constitute 'one identity' (van Dijck 2013).

Facebook profiles are routinely viewed and judged by others (Ivcevic and Ambady 2012) and therefore the online embodiment of the profile is often the first port of call for those wishing to convey queer and religious identities. For Andrew, the decision to remove his sexuality from his Facebook profile was directly influenced by his religious identity, and role within the church:

⁷ Some humorous gift cards play on the satire that one is not truly engaged to be married, employed in a new job or it appears on Facebook.

... so I am not described as being interested in either men or women. And part of that was obviously due to my profession - obviously Facebook, as much as we believe it is private can become public - and because of my role within the church; I just wanted to be sensitive. It was my own way of saying my private life is my private life; I don't feel the need any more to advertise in that sense. Those who know me and those who are special to me in my life know who I am and that's all that matters, I don't need everybody to know it (Andrew, 24 Newcastle).

The negotiation and re-emergence of the public-private divide has been ever present in sexualities scholarship, and has continued to be reshaped in social and legislative research (Richardson and Surya 2013). Here we see how this divide is worked out in the perceptions of Facebook as the 'public' space for which private lives need to be managed accordingly. Andrew's sexuality is now completely removed from Facebook, and is notable in its absence. The 'Interested in' section of the profile is not left blank, but completely removed from view. This absence resonates with earlier work into the 'showing and telling' of identity on Facebook; Zhao et al. (2008: 1830) argue that unlike heterosexual endorsements which were openly expressed on Facebook through photographs, declarations of heterosexual romance and marriages, the bisexual participants in their study expressed their sexuality in interviews but opted not to share this orientation on their Facebook page. The declaration of this identity on the Facebook profile come with arguably irreversible consequences:

'Virtual selves' commonly refers to online selves and 'real selves' to offline selves, but, as has been shown here, Facebook identities are clearly real in the sense that they have real consequences for the lives of the individuals who constructed them (Zhao et al 2008: 1832).

We can ascertain from Andrew's narrative that this decision is a calculated one, assessed through the potential consequences of adding this information to his Facebook profile, in order to remain 'sensitive' to his professional role and responsibilities of the church. This highlights a shift in the 'full identity' of participants being displayed through Facebook profiling, as exemplified by Georgina and Isabelle above, as Andrew consciously attempts to create boundaries between the public profile and his personal identities. Only those close to him have access to this information, and Andrew chooses this privacy as a form of protection.

Youth is often characterised by a period of intense and increasingly uneven transition. The transition from being partially 'out' as both queer and religious in some spaces in everyday life to incorporating both identities is increasingly mediated through online profiling, amalgamating previously fragmented identities. However, so too can these identities be consciously removed from Facebook profiling, in order to give a stronger preference to either sexuality or religion as the publicised 'full' identity of online embodiment, while keeping sexuality (or in other cases religion) *dis*embodied from the Facebook realm.

In some cases, the 'showing without telling' conceptualisation of Facebook identities (Zhao et al. 2008) became increasingly apparent in the experiences of participants

who actively came out through utilising the medium of social networking and other online technologies. Research into sexualities has produced extensive literature on the complex social, emotional and political processes of coming out as LGBT (Taylor 2007, 2009, Saxy 2008, Bérubé 2010). While there is a growing body of work focusing on how these processes are practiced through the medium of Facebook and other online technologies (Munt et al. 2002), there is significant room to amalgamate this transition with the online (dis)embodiment of Facebook profiling. Gloria (20, London) has not discussed her bisexual identity with her younger brother but conceded:

He's probably picked it up, like I'm on Twitter and I think that's part of my description, so he'd be a bit dim if he hadn't picked it up by now but he just hasn't mentioned it'.

The assumption that Gloria's brother will 'pick up' her sexuality from her Twitter account is testimony to the power of online embodiment, and implies that to be 'shown' through these social networking sites is as effective as being 'told'. Other quotes from participants revealed similar stories:

People kind of clicked on that I was gay because it was on Facebook that I was gay. You can't hide it; I'm not going to hide it from anyone, (Nicola 21).

I just worked myself up to the point where I couldn't deal with telling anyone face to face and.....I was chatting [online to her friend] about something but her boyfriend had said something about where he worked in the summer there was only two women and they were both gay, and I made some references and basically told her (Evelyn, 26, Manchester).

Obviously when I started seeing my current boyfriend it went on Facebook for all of my friends there, and they then knew (James, 17, Manchester).

Coming out through Facebook and Twitter muddles the distinction between online embodiment and the embodiment of face-to-face interactions. In Evelyn's case, she 'couldn't deal' with the corporeal, tangible embodiment of coming out through a face-to-face interaction, thus preferring to 'show without telling' online.

(Dis)embodiment, (dis)connection and temporality : managing emotions through online spaces.

(Dis)embodiment outside of online spaces continued to emerge as a key theme and came to the fore when negotiating queer and religious identities in different spaces and times. There appeared to be a certain temporal element to communicating online, where, in adhering to the spatial and temporal theories of sexualities (Bell and Binnie 2000, Taylor et al., 2010) certain aspects of the young people's identities were more strongly illuminated at particular times. In addition to Facebook, Skype also featured heavily as a form of online technology. In contrast to 'showing' her sexual identity, Georgina discusses how it is her religious identity which comes out more prominently during her Skype sessions with her parents:

It's hilarious, I talk to my parents once a week, on Skype, and I generally do it on a Sunday afternoon and all they hear about is St James (Georgina, 20,

London).

The fact that Georgina predominantly discusses her role in the church during her weekly communication with her parents is largely influenced by temporality; these sessions take place on a Sunday afternoon directly after her church attendance, thus these activities are fresh in her consciousness. The choice to describe this level of religious involvement as 'hilarious' implies that Georgina is reflectively aware of the disproportionate weight she gives to her religious identity (as opposed to her sexuality or other key constructions of the self). Were these encounters with her parents embodied at different times, these perceptions may also be different. This temporary online embodiment was at times favoured by participants who discussed the merits of disclosing their sexuality to a parent via these online media rather than in a face-to-face encounter. This differed slightly from the 'showing without telling' coming out of earlier examples, as this was based on 'telling;' through narrative articulation, yet remained disembodied and temporal:

[On the subject of coming out to her mother] I thought a video Skype call actually worked quite well because you could see each other and could respond to each other properly and you weren't going to have that awful 'still seeing each other for the first time' if you'd spoken about it on the phone or written a letter. But then at the same time, when it was finished, that was it, I could sort of exhale and say 'Oh, I can't believe I've just done that' and not have to make polite chat for the rest of the evening (Andrea, 24, Newcastle).

Andrea felt a welcome relief of (dis)connectedness afforded by video chat. Nervous about the process of disclosing her sexuality, this relief was twofold. Firstly, Andrea acknowledged the benefit of a limited timeframe for the conversation, after which the encounter could then be 'shut down' and Andrea and her mother would not have to share awkward affects in the same space. Embodied shame and internalised heterosexism has been identified as a key emotion in the process of coming out. The process of Andrea's disclosure to her mother is indeed a highly embodied and visceral one; Andrea exclaims that after the Skype communication had been terminated, she could then 'exhale' and allow her body to recover from the emotional process of the interaction. Secondly, however, Andrea was glad that this Skype encounter was, at least temporarily, *embodied enough* to avoid these difficulties having to occur at a later date. Andrea describes how seeing and responding to each other 'properly' meant that the 'first time' moment of when she would have to see her mother had been successfully avoided.

The sociology and geography of emotion have strongly asserted that emotions such as anger, pride and shame can greatly affect the body in different ways (Ahmed 2004). It is interesting therefore to question what *happens* to the visceral body, as opposed to the online body (for example the Facebook profile) during communication in online environments, and how this may affect the negotiation and facilitation of queer and religious identities for young people. Farquhar (2012) outlines the 'control' that can be maintained by online embodiment as oppose to the uncontrolled body, which can let down an interaction through blushing, twitching:

The performer also gives both intentional and unintentional cues to his audience/audiences. Intentional cues are controlled messages and, in the current study, almost all visual components of profile are considered intentional. Unintentional cues are often, in face-to-face interactions, non-verbal and include blushing, eye twitches, seating, and so on' (Farquhar 2012: 2).

If youth is characterised as a period of intensity and transition, it can be imagined that emotions such as anger, shame and relief may indeed be prominent in the disclosure and is played out through social media. Andrew (24) describes the embodied emotions involved in coming out to his father through Facebook:

Interviewer: That's so interesting, you let Facebook do the outing for you?

Yes, it was wonderful. It sounds a little bit cowardly when I say it in that sense but in some ways, to the other person it might be a benefit because it gives them time to think about what they've seen and what they understand about me before they actually communicate that back. Anger...it can be quite a destructive thing, it's how you respond to it. I remember when I first told my mum, there was no such thing as Facebook in 2001 so I had to tell her verbally; and again, it was that shocked response whereas I think if she'd seen something or understood it or saw it first, she might have had time to think about her response. So I can see the benefit of it, definitely, that approach to coming out (Andrew, 24, Newcastle).

Returning to the strategy of 'showing without telling' through Facebook, Andrew expresses his 'cowardly' guilt regarding how 'wonderful' it was to be able to come out to his father without a visceral, embodied encounter. Through Facebook, he was able to avoid the difficult embodied emotions that accompanied his coming out to his mother in the time period before Facebook, and allow a delayed, unintended reaction which may hinder relations in the future. This supports what Munt et al. (2002) refer to as the 'backstage' process of coming out online through Facebook, yet takes a closer embodied analysis. Julian (20, Newcastle), also happy to avoid what he refers to as a 'weird situation', supports the idea of temporal, controlled encounters online when outing his sexuality claiming 'I think is pretty good because it avoids a blazing row, it avoids saying anything in the heat of the moment'. The 'heat' of the visceral body is removed from the controlled, online embodiment of the Facebook profile. Through Facebook, it appears there are opportunities for emotions to take place without and prior to face to face interactions, which have greatly benefited the queer religious youth in their journeys of transition.

Online Spaces, New opportunities?

Online spaces were largely identified as a gateway to new opportunities for negotiating queer religious identities for young people, where other, more tangible spaces had previously appeared restrictive. Many gay men and lesbians of various ethnic and religious backgrounds experience an internal conflict because of a heterosexual upbringing and socialisation, and identity is considered as a fluid process, rather than as fixed and enduring throughout people's lives (Taylor and Snowdon, 2014). Ganzevoort et al. (2011) investigate the clash between religion and homosexuality and

examine strategies for dealing with 'religious identity confusion' arguing that individuals may eventually end up breaking down due to complications when living two completely different lives. Online networking created arguably 'new' and, at times (by no means always), safer spaces for young, queer Christians to work through their emotional and embodied identities:

I remember sitting up all night and I had two Bibles and the Internet and I was like, 'Hmm... These feelings, this Bible, it just doesn't fit together!' and so I did put my Bibles away and I was like, 'I just have to put those Bibles away until I can work out what's going on in my head. I have to leave everything' (Nicola....emphasis added).

This extract from Nicola does not pinpoint a specific social networking site or blog, instead referring, somewhat powerfully, to the vast, inviting realm of 'the internet'. Here, the internet is perceived to open up a new world for Nicola at a time when she is struggling to reconcile her identities as queer and religious. Sitting up alone all night in her bedroom, Nicola feels the materiality of the 'two bibles' have become insufficient to help her resolve 'what's going on' in her head. In contrast, the realm of online information, networking sites and virtual communication is perceived to provide endless (if not uncertain) knowledge and support which, unlike Nicola's previous religious knowledge and social history, has not yet reached its limitations.

It can be argued that Facebook and online networking can provide forums for queer religious youth who during their identity transition feel neither comfortable in LGBT 'scene space' (Taylor 2007) nor attending church. Thomas (34, Manchester) and

James (17, Manchester) reflect on 'fitting in to place' (Taylor 2012) through online environments:

I think they [queer religious youth] are disconnected to going to church every week but I still think they have faith, and having the internet is another way of expressing it, so instead of meeting people in a church, they are connecting with people from all over the world (Thomas, 34, Manchester).

To be fair, most of my friends are people I've not met. I'm a member of several online communities and because of my interest in computer games with that comes being involved in these communities and I'm quite heavily involved in them, so a lot of my friends are older, younger, gay, straight, Christian, Muslim, secular. I've got friends who live in Australia, Canada... Close to home I'm quite good friends with the people at this centre and I've got friends from college who I don't socialise much with outside of Facebook and social media as much, just friends my age group locally and then people from around the world, online (James, 17, Manchester).

Yet this paper has shown that 'coming out', or indeed 'outing'; through online social networking can provide opportunities for queer religious youth that offer a complex relationship between identities negotiated through online places and face-to-face interactions. Participants in the project found the 'space' of Facebook and other networking sites helpful in providing a smoother transition to 'coming out' as queer and

religious. Moving on from earlier studies of Facebook and identity construction and disembodiment (Zhao, Grasmuck and Martin 2008) where online identities were constructed as separate to those of the 'present', corporeal body, the data analysed for the 'making space for queer identifying religious youth' project more closely ties in with more recent conceptualisations of Facebook profiles as 'online embodiment' in itself.

Conclusion

Facebook profiling has come to be widely understood as the ultimate identity formation, featuring instantaneous information about bodies, identities, religion, sexuality and religious affiliations. However, this article has explored the difficulties and complexities involved when certain aspects of young people's identities collide. In the case of queer religious youth, and often during periods of intense transition, exploration and change, this article has made way for thinking about Facebook and online networks and communication as a (new) space of deep significance during such transitions. In contrast with online technologies creating difficulties and unwelcome exposure, many of the participants in 'making space for queer-identifying religious youth' worked with these new spaces in order to produce opportunities for negotiation between their religious and queer identities. Exciting research into sexualities and the process of coming as LGBT has shown that this continues to be a highly embodied and emotional journey, layered with complex social histories and discourses of shame, pride, anger and fear (Taylor and Snowden, 2014). The young people in this research have highlighted how the use of online technology can be used as a tool to negotiate this process in different ways. Using the space of Facebook, Twitter and Skype to remove the visceral body from an otherwise highly embodied face-to-face encounter,

at times provides welcome respite for young people. Facebook and Skype can also create new timescales as well as spaces, both speeding up and slowing down the temporal process of expressing queer and religious identities. Again, this can distort earlier patterns of the 'before and after' effect of coming out, and help avoid undesired embodied presences in particular moments of interaction or discovery. In thinking through '10 Years of Facebook', there is a greater need to examine more closely the role of embodiment, disconnection and emotional complexities in social research into Facebook and other forms of social media. This builds upon the valuable, if not limited, conceptualisation of 'online embodiment' to incorporate a greater wealth of emotional and embodied geographies that can benefit the analysis of future research beyond the specific cohort of this study.

Finally, this article has explored our own online embodiment in the qualitative research process, as implicated in methodological developments and research advancements in and through Facebook. Befriending and 'de-friending' on personal Facebook sites evoked significant dilemmas for how researchers working with young people then exit the field. As researchers it could be argued that we can never fully exit our online bodies from the field while social networking is always present - only the removal of all Facebook and Twitter profiles entirely would be an 'end' to the research project. This dilemma does not end with this paper, and for the future of qualitative research in a time of digital technology we argue that such complications *should* reshape the formality of research ethics.

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