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In this qualitative study I explored the social media activities of 25 lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer students with disabilities at a research-intensive university. Using a framework of identity-making that accounts for students' reflections, narrations, and actions, I detail students' experiences exploring queer/disability identities through social networking sites, smartphone applications, and blogs. Students described going online to find validation, become involved, and manage identities contextually; however, students also described experiencing marginalization online and feeling isolated, suggesting implications for higher education, including the need to critically evaluate students' online engagement.

Miranda, a graduate student who identified as queer, as asexual, and as having multiple psychological and medical disabilities, described how reading a blog prompted her to view herself as a person with disabilities for the first time:

> I think I really started to identify as disabled when I started reading a blog called "Feminists With Disabilities for a Way Forward." . . . I never thought of myself as disabled before reading that, even though effectively I was. I started reading that blog. I remember just driving with my partner in the car one day and being like, "I think I really feel like I'm actually disabled." She's like, "Well, you are disabled." I'm like, "Yeah, but I actually identify this way. This is interesting for me."

For Miranda, going online and reading a blog prompted a shift toward viewing disability as an aspect of her identity that intersected with her gender identity and political commitments. Engagement with social media gave students in this study a chance to explore their identities, and, for some, to cement how they identified or gain new language that prompted a revelation. Online engagement with social media, then, presents an opportunity for higher education scholars and practitioners to understand students' identity development processes (in this case disability, gender identity, and sexual orientation) in a more nuanced way.

Minimal research on queer students with disabilities in higher education has been published (Duke, 2011); however, discourses of coming out, passing, and performativity that pervade work across both queer and disability studies (Kafer, 2013; McRuer, 2006; Sherry, 2004) suggest the need to explore how queer students with disabilities might construct and refine their identities in alternative spaces not typically explored in research on student development, such as online venues. Previous work has addressed the myriad reasons that queer people and people with disabilities might go online: to meet other people, seek information, cope with hostility, become politically active, and develop, name, or refine an identity (Craig & McInroy, 2014; Shpigelman & Gill, 2014). These considerations may be amplified for those who are not considered visibly queer or disabled, lack ready access to urban communities or

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transportation, face persistent discrimination and harassment, or do not know other people with disabilities or queer people in their peer groups or families (Sherry, 2004).

Research on college students' social media use is increasing (Martínez Alemán & Wartman, 2009), yet there is a need for further research on the nexus between student technology use and identity development in higher education (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). Seeking to address this need, one primary research question guided the study: How do self-identified LGBTQ students with disabilities describe their use of social media as a venue for identity exploration and management?

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Social media include "Internet applications that rely on openly shared digital content that is authored, critiqued, and re-configured by a mass of users" (Selwyn, 2011, p. 1). Social media can include social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter), smartphone applications (Snapchat, Grindr), content sharing sites (YouTube, Flickr), blogs (WordPress, Tumblr), and instant messaging. The use of social media allows individuals to cast multiple images of themselves via profiles, blogs, chatting, photos, and videos, creating impressions that may or may not align with how others perceive them (or how they view themselves) in offline, in-person spaces (Kasch, 2013; Torres et al., 2009). Thus, social media activity may serve an increasingly central purpose in understanding one's sense of self and construction and management of various social identities.

Social Media and Higher Education

Students entering college may increasingly be "digital natives" who have used sophisticated technology since birth (Levine & Dean, 2012); yet colleges and universities must decipher how to best use social media to engage their student populations (Selwyn, 2011). Students' use of social media may offer a variety of benefits, including connections to other students and the institution (Kolek & Saunders, 2008), reduced isolation (Torres et al., 2009; Varjas, Meyers, Kiperman, & Howard, 2013), and access to resources (Varjas et al., 2013). As much of this engagement occurs outside of formal coursework (Selwyn, 2009), student affairs professionals have the opportunity to engage students in the development of their identities that are increasingly (re)created and managed at least partially online (Kasch, 2013). Yet, potential drawbacks to social media use include the disclosure of personal information leading to stalking, violence, and cyberbullying (Bauman & Baldasare, 2015; Kolek & Saunders, 2008). Social media use has been associated with the possibility of psychological distress, including feelings of loneliness, depression, and envy (Moreno et al., 2011; Tandoc, Ferrucci, & Duffy, 2015), though the causes and extent of this phenomenon are debated in the literature (Beranuy, Oberst, Carbonell, & Chamarro, 2009; Bonebrake, 2002; Shaw & Gant, 2002).

Extensive use of Facebook may erode students' social skills, thus negatively affecting integration and engagement on campus (McEwan, 2011). Despite assumptions that social media use negatively affects academic engagement, one study at a predominantly White research university revealed that social media use did not affect students' persistence (Strayhorn, 2012). Most of students' interactions on Facebook are not related to their coursework or formal education; students much more commonly discussed leisure, entertainment, employment, and relationships (Selwyn, 2009).

Scholars have also focused on whether use of social media platforms enhance students' accrual of social capital (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). Developing networks of online contacts through social media might support

students' development of "digital social capital" (Seale, Georgeson, Mamas, & Swain, 2015, p. 119). The authors of one study found positive, though small, relationships between duration and frequency of Facebook use and students' social capital in arenas such as life satisfaction, social trust, and civic engagement (Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009).

Social media can also offer a venue for deciding and showcasing one's identities, relationships, and worldviews, particularly in emerging adulthood (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). Facets of social media use such as anonymity, interactivity, and connectivity "assist in enabling powerful relations and interactions that benefit some youth very positively" (Maczewski, 2002, p. 111). Students may feel the need to manage the impressions of others on Facebook to convey particular traits, such as those of the partier, socialite, risk-taker, comic, institutional citizen, and/or eccentric, as identified in one study (Birnbaum, 2013). As most research on social media in higher education has focused on student engagement, academic performance, and social capital, additional inquiry into social media as a venue for identity exploration is needed.

Disability and Social Media

Research has outlined specific benefits, such as developmental and social possibilities, and drawbacks, particularly inaccessibility, of social media use by people with disabilities. While social media may be used broadly to reduce isolation and meet others, it may more readily facilitate connections for those who selectively disclose disabilities, particularly those not readily visible. People with disabilities can use social media to connect with others who have a similar disability, raise awareness, organize politically, and develop a positive disability identity and self-esteem (Shpigelman & Gill, 2014). They may also benefit from interacting anonymously online and thus potentially avoiding disability stigma (Bowker & Tuffin, 2003). Authors of a study with people with physical and sensory disabilities found that participants weighed the potential benefits and harm of revealing a disability online (Bowker & Tuffin, 2003). Social media use may benefit the social development and college transition needs of students with autism spectrum disorders (Cullen, 2015). While the two aforementioned studies focus on particular populations, many of the other studies reviewed here reference people with disabilities as an umbrella group that includes multiple types of disabilities.

Obstacles encountered by students with disabilities using social media include technical problems, disorganized layouts, privacy concerns, and a lack of accessibility (Asuncion et al., 2012). Facebook and other social media could be used for empowerment and advocacy by people with disabilities, though one study found this potential largely unrealized (Shpigelman & Gill, 2014). Furthermore, many social networking sites are inaccessible because they are often text-based and present the potential for misinterpretation of communication and unwanted self-disclosure (DeHaan, Kuper, Magee, Bigelow, & Mustanski, 2013; Shpigelman & Gill, 2014). Accessibility is further limited along linguistic and socioeconomic lines, as social media use assumes ownership of necessary technology and often the ability to read and type in English (Selwyn, 2011; Wakeford, 2000).

LGBTQ Identities and Social Media

Technology has played a pivotal role in the lives of many LGB people, as it may be used to publically announce their identities (Varjas et al., 2013). For LGBTQ youth who are unable to find various social, sexual, and health needs met in offline venues, the Internet has functioned to fill in gaps in finding

friends, romantic/sexual partners, LGBTQ-related events and services, and sexual health information (Craig & McInroy, 2014; DeHaan et al., 2013; Harper, Bruce, Serrano, & Jamil, 2009; Hillier, Mitchell, & Ybarra, 2012). Social media may help develop and showcase resilience among LGBTQ youth, enabling them to cope with discrimination and build community (Craig, McInroy, McCready, & Alaggia, 2015). A subset of this research has explored young gay and bisexual men's online activities (Gudelunas, 2012; Harper et al., 2009). Gay and bisexual men in college may use the Internet to "learn about sex, to access pornography, to make friends, and to identify real-life sex partners" (Wilkerson, Brooks, & Ross, 2010, p. 293).

Online media can provide "critical opportunities for LGBTQ youth to explore their identities and develop important skills," particularly the ability to "rehearse crucial developmental tasks (e.g., coming out, cultivating identity, increasing self-confidence and self-acceptance, and building relationships)" online before experiencing these phenomena offline (Craig & McInroy, 2014, p. 105). Duguay (2014) investigated the use of social networking sites by LGB youth and the potential for reducing traditional boundaries and creating a sense of "context collapse" online (p. 1). Participants in Duguay's study intentionally managed their identities to parse the information available to particular audiences. Tailoring performances and separating audiences became strategies many youth utilized to avoid unintentional context collapse.

Though research on LGB people and social media generally touts the benefits of such technology, significant drawbacks are possible, including cyberbullying and victimization (Varjas et al., 2013). In higher education, LGBTQ students may seek online communities for safety and comfort and reduce their involvement in, or skip altogether, on-campus organizations and activities, a shift that may challenge the traditional paradigms of higher education administrators (Dilley, 2010).

Scholarship about transgender identity development, both broadly and as related to social media use, is limited (Craig & McInroy, 2014; Nicolazzo, 2015). When included, transgender participants often made up a small subset of the overall studies, a point raised by Nicolazzo (2015) and substantiated in the studies reviewed here (e.g., 4 of 19 participants in Craig and McInroy, 2014; 3 of 32 participants in DeHaan et al., 2013); however, several authors did consider the social media use of transgender students, suggesting that online engagement plays a significant role in the resilience of transgender college students (Nicolazzo, 2015; Pusch, 2003) and transgender youth of color (Singh, 2013) as they go online to build community, identify role models, and find support and information. Nicolazzo has called upon higher education scholars and practitioners to consider virtual spaces as part of the overall campus environment, as evidenced by the extensive online engagement exhibited by students in hir study.

LGBTQ Students With Disabilities

Top-tier higher education journals have rarely published research about students with disabilities, particularly qualitative research and studies concerning identity development (Peña, 2014). By contrast, though studies on LGB student development are relatively more common, gaps in this body of research still exist, particularly related to transgender students and intersections of identities including race and ability (Renn, 2010). A metasynthesis of 24 publications on LGBT youth with disabilities (Duke, 2011) uncovered only two publications on higher education, both of which were descriptive and nonempirical (Harley, Nowak, Gassaway, &

Savage, 2002; Underhile & Cowles, 1998). Empirical studies of LGBTQ college students with disabilities remain rare (Henry, Fuerth, & Figliozzi, 2010; Miller, 2015).

Research on social media and college students is burgeoning; a subset on the function of social media with relation to identity development is also growing. Though research on social media often highlights benefits of use, it should be noted that pervasive, overlapping systems of oppression lead to a dearth of offline resources in the first place (Harper et al., 2009). Studies on LGBTQ students have addressed identity management and disclosure concerns as well as sexual health and relationships. By contrast, studies on disability and social media have focused on accessibility, communication, and empowerment. The research reviewed informs this study's exploration of LGBTQ students with disabilities and their engagement with online spaces as a venue for identity work—an intersection of identities that has not received attention in published scholarship on social media use in higher education.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this study I employed the multimodal framework of identity-making, which Orsatti and Riemer (2015) developed to study social media use through a performative lens. Butler (1990) posited gender as performative—that is, enacted through repetitive performed acts, a concept that McRuer (2006) has employed in relation to the interplay between disability and queerness. Orsatti and Riemer critique much of the research on social media and identity as essentialist—seeking, for example, to examine whether congruence exists between online and offline representations of self and identity. They propose instead that such research might adopt a nonessentialist view of "a person as not having a stable, central, and unified self but . . . as continuously being constituted and reaffirmed by being part of various social practices and contexts" (p. 6). Use of the Internet "becomes an active part of how people form identities and how they come to understand themselves," a position that suggests use of the term *identity-making* to convey an ongoing process rather than an accomplished act merely transmitted through social media (p. 1).

Using the framework, I distinguish among several modes of identity construction with relation to research on social media use, including (a) reflection, or "analysis of how people present themselves in social media strategically as a way to form a certain identity"; (b) narration, which "allows for analysis of how people narrate themselves into the shared stories of the communities they are part of both online and offline"; and (c) action, a "fine-grained analysis of how people's use (or nonuse) of social media takes part in forming identities" (Orsatti & Riemer, 2015, p. 12).

METHOD

Situational analysis, a postmodern extension of grounded theory developed by Clarke (2005), guided this study, in which I used qualitative methods to gather in-depth perspectives from a purposefully selected group on a complex phenomenon (Maxwell, 2013). Situational analysis calls the researcher's attention to the larger social arenas and contexts in which research is conducted. Though situational analysis departs from grounded theory in that it is aimed at thick analysis rather than theory generation (Clarke, 2005), I still employed many foundational principles of grounded theory, including simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis, constructing analytical codes and categories from data, advancing theory development during each step of data analysis, analytic and reflective

memo writing throughout the study, and sampling for theoretical purposes rather than for representativeness (Charmaz, 2014). This article is a subset of a larger study focusing on students' intersectional experiences of disability and LGBTQ identities, and here I focus specifically on student engagement with social media.

Participants

After receiving approval from the institutional review board at the university under study (a large, predominantly White research university), I recruited students who identified as LGBTQ and disclosed a disability to participate in one to two in-person, semistructured interviews about their social identities and campus experiences. Purposeful recruitment primarily occurred through electronic means, including social media and listservs of academic centers, student affairs offices, and student organizations related to disability and LGBTQ identities (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). Prospective participants contacted me to discuss the study's goals, procedures, and consent process before arranging an initial time for an interview at an on-campus location of the participant's choosing. I also employed snowball sampling, as I encouraged early participants in the study to reach out to peers for possible participation.

Participants included 13 undergraduate students and 12 graduate school students ranging in age from 18-year-old undergraduates to several graduate students in their 30s. The social identities reported in this section were disclosed to me in the course of interviews; in many categories, students identified simultaneously with multiple descriptors. The sample was predominantly White (18 students), though participants also identified their race/ethnicity as Mexican American, Chicana/o, or Latina/o (9), biracial/multiracial (5), Jewish (3), Native American (3), Black (1), and Chinese (1). Participants who identified as Jewish variously perceived that identity as ethnic, cultural, and/or religious.

Most participants identified with more than one disability label; in total, participants identified with 33 distinct labels. In all, 19 participants identified with mental health issues or psychological disabilities, with depression (14 students) and anxiety (13) predominating. Participants also disclosed medical disabilities (9), attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (4), autism spectrum disorders (4), temporary disabilities (4), learning disabilities (3), physical disabilities (2), visual impairments (1), and hearing impairments (1). In terms of gender, participants identified as women (12), men (8), transgender (3), nonbinary (2), and genderqueer (1). Participants disclosed a variety of labels for sexuality, consistent with the notion that young people are utilizing an expanding set of labels and that those labels may not necessarily reflect sexual behavior (Savin-Williams, Joyner, & Rieger, 2012). Most commonly, students identified as queer (14) along with another descriptor they might use contextually (e.g., bisexual, gay, lesbian), though participants also identified with terms such as asexual (2), polyamorous (2), demisexual (1), panromantic (1), pansexual (1), and quioromantic (1), terms that participants often learned about on the Internet.

Data Collection and Analysis

Transcripts from in-depth, semistructured interviews formed the primary data for this study and were supplemented with documents collected from the university site (e.g., campus newspaper articles, institutional policies, and brochures regarding disability services and the LGBT center; Jones et al., 2014; Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003). Prior to the interview itself, participants were given the interview protocol and invited to schedule either one longer block of time to complete the interview

or two shorter meetings. A total of 19 participants took part in one interview, while 6 participated in two interviews (N = 25). Total interview time per participant averaged 90 minutes, which yielded more than 40 hours of interviews. The protocol included four sections: the student's personal background and college choice; social identities, identity intersections, and community identifications; experiences on campus; and perspectives on allies and advice for faculty and administrators.

To maximize accessibility and attempt to increase participants' power in the interview process, interviewees were invited to choose the interview location, read questions in advance, rearrange the protocol if they desired, and skip or return back to questions at any time during the interview. The interview itself was likely a site for identity work (Alvesson, 2011); indeed, several participants' professed views on their identities and how they managed them appeared to shift during or across interviews. Discussion of students' online activities emerged at least once with every participant, but particularly in the section on identity, intersections, and community. Thus, while the larger study did not initially focus on online engagement, it quickly became apparent that students viewed their online activities as closely connected with their identities and campus experiences.

Interview transcripts, university documents, and analytic/reflective memos and field notes regarding interviews written by the researcher were analyzed using coding techniques associated with grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). Each transcript was coded separately using in vivo (direct quotes from participants) and process (gerund words reflecting actions) coding techniques to help the researcher better reflect on the interview content (Saldaña, 2009). Across interview transcripts, 87 themes from initial coding were then refined and reorganized into six focused codes and two axial codes (Saldaña, 2009). This article, as a subset of the larger study, highlights the forming community axial code identified during analysis, which included students' processes of venturing online to connect with others and explore their identities in depth.

In addition, I also constructed multiple versions of three types of situational maps as outlined by Clarke (2005). These maps included messy and ordered situational maps, social worlds/arenas maps, and positional maps (Clarke, 2005). The maps created were always provisional and did not represent the final products of data analysis, but rather tools to assist the researcher in exploring novel points of connection between and among codes and relationships present (or not present) in the data. Constructing situational maps aided in identifying the roles of technology and online engagement as nonhuman elements/actants as well as implicating technology in the social worlds/arenas that students navigated both within and outside of higher education. In addition, situational mapmaking foregrounded various discourses of online engagement as unreal (as opposed to a "real," physical/offline world), potentially dangerous, variously too public or too private, and subordinate to physical/offline spaces. Last, I relied upon the insights of four peer debriefers during analysis, including graduate students and faculty members who identified as LGBTQ and/or with disabilities.

Catalytic Validity and Reflexivity

Williams and Morrow (2009) contended that several standards of research quality cross paradigms, including "integrity of the data, balance between reflexivity and subjectivity, and clear communication of findings" (p. 577). Utilizing these components, the collection of rich data, including interview transcripts, documents from the research site, researcher

memos, and observational/field notes, helped to ensure the credibility of this research. Furthermore, I viewed disclosure of my positionality as the researcher and my goals in conducting the study with participants as essential (Jones et al., 2014; Maxwell, 2013). In conversations with prospective participants prior to signing consent forms, I shared my identities as a White, temporarily able-bodied, queer cisgender man, and a first-generation college graduate, aspects of identity that offered points of connection or disconnection with each participant. Despite my heavy involvement in queer activism and social justice education more broadly during my time as a student and young professional, I started to acknowledge my own biases and lack of knowledge related to disability when I directed an LGBT resource center on a college campus and worked alongside queer students with disabilities. Based on this experience, I began to engage disability intentionally in my teaching, research, and practice. At the conclusion of the study, I reflected that my role as a queer researcher likely contributed to building initial rapport with many participants, while my status as temporarily able-bodied perhaps created some distance between us. Despite this distance (or perhaps because of it), participants shared rich descriptions of their experiences with disabilities.

I also sought catalytic validity in this study, which signifies "the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses, and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it" (Lather, 1991, p. 68). I engaged in a dialogue with participants that aimed to be reciprocal and mutually beneficial. Preliminary and emergent findings were shared with participants, who were encouraged to offer feedback and help shape the direction of the study. The reflections of some students suggested that participation in the study helped students to reflect about themselves and their experiences on campus. In the words of one undergraduate student participant, "You're giving me more thought, fuel for the fire." Another student shared a desire to pursue graduate school and conduct similar research in the future. One student viewed her participation in the study as a way to be a disability activist.

FINDINGS

This section presents findings that address students' online journeys of (a) finding validation, (b) becoming involved, and (c) managing identities contextually. Each of the 25 students in this study mentioned some form of online engagement, which ranged from passive (browsing and reading) to active (writing for blogs, engaging in activism, finding partners to "hook up" with; Harper et al., 2009). Students utilized social networking sites, blogs, and smartphone applications, and specifically named Facebook, Grindr, Tumblr, Twitter, WordPress, and YouTube. Many students framed discussions of their disabilities and queer identities separately, as is reflected in the quotes and descriptions within this section. However, some participants described their online engagement as intersectional, and in fact viewed online spaces as potentially the only venue to experience an intersectional queer/disabled community. While many students in this study used the term *intersectionality* in reference to their experiences and/or understanding of possible relationships between disability and queerness, close reading of students' depictions of their identities reflected that some viewed themselves as possessing multiple contextually salient identities while others described an interactive, mutually reinforcing linkage between queerness and disability (the subject of a manuscript in development based on the larger study).

Finding Validation

Many factors promoted the development of virtual connections for participants, such as the stigma associated with disability and queer identities, perceived provision of anonymity, many students' identities as introverts who avoided social situations, and the tendency to seek out others who had similar impairments rather than a broad disability community. For those who lived with impairments that were not common in the campus community, finding others online with shared experience offered a sense of support and validation that may have been difficult to achieve on the physical campus. Joining with others online provided a low-risk outlet to share experiences and form relationships, minimizing the possibility for stigma and negative reactions, or at least providing a quick escape route—signing off or blocking another user—in case of such experiences.

Zachary, a gay male undergraduate, said that he "usually leave[s] disability out" when thinking about his identities, a reflection that mainstream diversity discourses (include campus diversity discourses) often separate disability from diversity defined by race, gender, and sexual orientation. Still, the idea of a disability community was appealing since his primary interaction with others with Tourette's syndrome occurred online: "It wasn't even in person; it was just over Facebook chat. I'm glad that I have at least that—like at least one person to talk to about it." Desi, an undergraduate who identified as demisexual, queer, and transgender and as having Asperger's, did not often connect in person with other people with Asperger's due to stigma and what he viewed as pervasive ableism on campus, but found a sense of community online: "I don't feel as much as a community with [Asperger's], but online, when people talk about disability and how it affects their daily lives, . . . I feel validated when I hear [their] commentaries about ableism."

Taylor, an undergraduate student who identified as genderqueer and as having depression and anxiety, found online spaces to be effective venues for self-education:

> I'm constantly trying to educate myself, and I participate in a lot of discussions on Facebook and on other corners of the Internet that are educational, and hopefully not too antagonistic, but often turn antagonistic. I have a lot of knowledge, and I have accumulated a fair amount of research on different identities and things like that, because of self-education.

The Internet could also be a vehicle for coming out as queer and/or disabled. Rodney shared that his knowledge of Facebook's features had advanced since his first tentative step of indicating he was interested in men on his profile page, despite "not really realizing that people would know" he identified as gay and therefore unknowingly violating the heterosexist assumption that all people (should) identify as heterosexual. While Rodney's experience turned out positively, Sandy recounted the trauma of being outed to family members against her will due to a student organization's Facebook page not being set to private.

For Jackie, who sought out online communities around asexuality and disability, finding others in similar situations served as a way to validate her experience and provide an outlet. Most often interacting as an "anonymous browser" on disability sites, Jackie began following the writing of another woman with an autoimmune disease and found comfort in similarities they shared.

> I follow a bunch of other disabled people. I follow just to get a better grasp of other disabilities. I follow a couple of autistic people just to see how they're doing. I

> follow a couple of other major depressives and it's comforting to see a thought process that's similar to mine. It's hard to see them go through rough times because they're all online. It could be a little helpful just to have a little boost from someone anonymous but there's not much I could do for them, so it sucks at the same time. But it's also I guess it's nice that we both know that each other are out there.

Exploring blogs became comforting for Jackie, as she explored new labels and language. At the conclusion of this study, she considered starting a blog: "I guess it wouldn't be bad. I would like to find someone like myself. . . . Here's a panromantic, asexual with depression." Connecting with disability online, either with specific disability communities or broad, intersectional categories, offered a source of support students often lacked on campus.

Becoming Involved

Online engagement ranged from being "an anonymous browser," in the words of Jackie, to a Twitter activist, in Abby's case. Some students ventured beyond reading blogs and connecting with others to use the Internet as a vehicle for their activism and involvement, describing the ways in which they felt they could give back to others by sharing their experiences. Becoming part of online narcolepsy communities allowed Abby to claim a disability identity more actively and to connect with others. On campus, she questioned whether to disclose her sexuality and disability to professors, peers, and undergraduate students in the courses she taught, concluding that she might be unjustly evaluated or targeted if she fully disclosed these identities. She valued "using the Internet as a tool to raise awareness and to build people's knowledge and understanding about narcolepsy specifically, about sleep disorders, about invisible disabilities, things like that." Abby challenged the assertion that online activism was invalid or inauthentic.

> In terms of disability communities, a lot of what I do is on the Internet, like Twitter activism, which some people think is not real. I could argue to death about that. A lot of organizing, awareness raising, that thing. I think of where my community is and it's mostly online. . . . The people who I find and surround myself in those spaces are people who are thinking from very intersectional standpoints.

Connecting online around narcolepsy and disability in general promoted a sense of support and community for Abby and several other participants. In becoming involved in online venues that were not explicitly intersectional, Abby reflected on the need to come out as queer due to the heterosexist assumption of being "straight until proven otherwise." Given the need to disclose one identity or another even in contexts focused primarily on disability or queerness, including on campus, students described an offline queer/disability community primarily as hypothetical, but felt that they could engage their multiple identities simultaneously in online spaces.

Miranda described a passion for engaging in online communities for a variety of reasons that benefited her and others. She explained, "I feel like my voice is definitely strongest in online communities, both disabled and queer. I think anything that I do there I usually feel a little more confident doing it because of the anonymity, but, also, I'm like, 'I wish I could get the recognition for this.'" Miranda enjoyed sharing advice and insights based on her experience: "I give a lot of recommendations, and that's where I've really found my voice, in online communities both anonymous and not. . . . So, I've really put myself out there as that kind of voice, coming from an autistic perspective, but also just trying to help." Miranda found a sense of satisfaction from sharing advice:

> I enjoy being able to take the things that I know from my identities and the experiences that I've had along my journey so far and use those things to help other people. I know I've had some unique experiences, and I've had some very general experiences that a lot of people have had. Moving in the circles online that I do, especially in these kind of Tumblr type circles, where there are a lot of kids who are 17, 18, and having these same issues, I [have been] able to share what I've done and say, "Look, this is what I've had."

For Miranda, going online and giving advice became an outlet where she could transform difficult experiences she faced into useful recommendations for others.

Managing Identities Contextually

Students' descriptions of their activities online revealed that they carefully considered how they would represent themselves in particular virtual spaces. As Miranda became more comfortable in her graduate program, she decided to begin sharing more articles and information related to LGBTQ identities and disability on her Facebook page, conscious that peers she had connected with would see her postings:

> I pull a lot of things that I'm interested in that I want people to know about onto my personal page, which a lot of people who are involved in school see, which is good because then I can try to get this stuff out to them because it's important that they know about this sort of disability activism that's going on.

While concerned that professors and peers might view her disabilities as signaling less academic capability—an assumption rooted in ableism and particularly virulent at a top-tier research university—Miranda said that she began sharing disability-related articles on her Facebook page and that she posted intentionally so that many of her classmates would see this content and have a chance to learn more. Likewise, another graduate student, Elijah, said it was only in the past year that he "felt comfortable putting bipolar things on my Facebook, for fear that somebody would judge me."

Unlike most students in this study who recounted positive experiences engaging in online communities, Madison saw some online communities primarily as venues to spread negativity:

> I was active on a disability forum, but I kind of distance myself from that, because I felt a lot of it was just complaining and I thought, "You know, I can understand the need for talking about problems that you are having, but I don't want to just surround myself with nothing but complaining." I wanted to think more positively instead of complaining about how bad I feel when I can do stuff and just try to do stuff anyway. If I can't, then at least I tried. I distanced myself from that a bit.

Madison felt the need to distance herself from online disability communities because of what she saw as negative attitudes and "complaining," perhaps unintentionally drawing upon the ableist notion that people with disabilities seek special treatment.

Students also had mixed feelings about smartphone applications designed to facilitate hookups, sex, and dating, which often reinforced intersecting oppressions (e.g., racism). Elijah tried using Grindr, but did not feel like he fit in socially with other men on the application. Rodney, a graduate student who identified as biracial, Black, and White, described race and sexuality as the "most significant of the intersections" of his identities. He faced racism from other gay men via Grindr and other applications:

> The most overt racism I've ever experienced has definitely been from gay people. . . .

> Before I met [my husband], I definitely did the dating scene and stuff and just did a number of people who would explicitly say, "White people only." That wasn't something that ever crossed my mind, but it always like, when I did confront it, it like really did bother me in the sense of—I felt frustrated and I also felt doubly frustrated because I was like, "Don't you realize that because I'm like half way Black, there are a lot of Black people who don't like me either, they're like, who is going to like me? No one is going to like me." I definitely got super insecure about that.

Rodney experimented on a phone application for gay men by including a picture or not with his profile, finding that fewer people would talk to him when he posted a picture. Students who had negative experiences online often responded by tailoring the information they shared in particular spaces or by disengaging from particular online venues altogether, actions that may be especially pervasive among students with multiple marginalized identities including queer students of color such as Rodney.

DISCUSSION

Tompkins (2011), in his study of cisgender people with trans-identified partners, remarked:

> Lines between real/unreal, fact/fiction, public/private, true/false, online/offline are being blurred as internet technologies infiltrate our daily lives through e-mail, instant messaging, webcams, and social networking sites such as Facebook. . . . Internet technologies allow us to exist in a kind of temporal space of online/offline, a life that is lived at the intersections of public/private and real/unreal. But in very real ways, these technologies allow us to be in spaces we were unable to be in before, collapsing geographic distance to be "with" other people like us when we previously weren't able to do so. (p. 44)

Many of the students in this study negotiated boundaries between online and offline, often prioritizing the freedom and connections one could experience online, particularly when the notion of a physical space or community that embraced queerness and disability seemed hypothetical.

Abby's self-proclaimed Twitter activism, which she noted "some people think is not real," typified some of the prevailing discourses students navigated about their online engagement: too much time spent on social media could be viewed as "not real," risky, detrimental to academics, or simply a waste of time. Indeed, several participants in this study described experiencing racism online, feeling isolated, and growing weary of what they perceived as a negative focus of many online spaces; however, this study also suggests that students adopted a tempered view of their online engagement, weighing both the benefits and drawbacks of being part of online communities. Perceived benefits included the opportunities for support and validation: online, students could manage stigma, engage anonymously, explore new identities, establish relationships, build community, raise political awareness, and help others. These descriptions reveal the performative aspects of students' identities, as they continually sought out online spaces to explore and learn about disability, gender identity, and sexual orientation. While in physical campus spaces, students ambivalently approached the task of naming their identities to be intelligible to others, going online provided an outlet whereby students could (re)create and communicate any number of identities and interests.

Students' descriptions of their activities on social media corresponded to each component of the multimodal framework of identity-making: reflection, narration, and action (Orsatti & Riemer, 2015). Students shared examples of narrating "themselves into the

shared stories of the communities they are part of" (Orsatti & Riemer, 2015, p. 12). Simply reading others' opinions about ableism and discrimination online helped to validate Desi's experiences, particularly since he did not see possibilities for connecting in person with other students on the autism spectrum. By following the blogs of other people with disabilities and expressing her support as they experienced challenges, Jackie described feeling more connected to others even as she lamented that the relationships existed only online. However, students also shared times when they narrated themselves out of particular communities, such as Madison's experience distancing herself from a disability forum she viewed as overly negative and Elijah's discomfort with meeting other men on Grindr. Occasionally, students were narrated out by others, including in Rodney's encounters with racism in gay dating applications and users who explicitly told him they only dated White men.

While students often shared that they engaged in narrative activities online as they became more comfortable with disabled and/or queer identities, this gradual engagement often gave way to broader and more active self-identification with disability and sexuality communities online. In terms of reflective activities, many students described presenting themselves intentionally and strategically while online to convey their identities and manage the impressions of others—fundamentally performative acts—a finding that builds on previous research (Kasch, 2013). Students used online venues such as Facebook to disclose their identities to others whom they knew offline, an activity that seemingly cut across (some) social contexts given the ubiquity of Facebook in students' lives. By contrast, Miranda's targeted use of Facebook to disseminate articles to peers in her graduate program and her use of blogs and other social media to connect with those who shared her identities illustrated that reflective activities were often highly specialized and directed at particular audiences. Reflection broadly assumed greater importance for students who believed they could pass as nondisabled, cisgender, and/or heterosexual in their offline lives; in fact, most students in this study acknowledged being able to occasionally conceal a disability and/or their queer identities while on campus.

Students' actions online ranged from lurking (browsing anonymously to establish comfort and familiarity—seemingly an essential activity for those who saw themselves as introverts) to becoming experts or power users (Orsatti & Riemer, 2015), in the case of Abby's passion for being a Twitter activist around queer/disability identities and Miranda's choice to give frequent recommendations and advice to others. The degree and frequency of social media use varied among participants. For Zachary, having "one person to talk to" about Tourette's syndrome seemed to temporarily satisfy his need for connection with others, while Jackie viewed her online activity as a daily activity so meaningful that she considered starting a blog about asexual and disability identities. Students generally appeared to perceive going online as a relatively low-risk exercise in sharing their identities and connecting with others, as they could simply leave a site or online community if they chose. However, particular actions (or lack thereof)—such as understanding and adjusting Facebook privacy settings—could have negative consequences for students who were outed against their will to family or friends.

Ultimately, students did not experience "context collapse" online, but rather carefully and strategically managed their identities and how they performed them in online spaces (Duguay, 2014, p. 1). Virtual engagement could not be viewed simplistically as a stepping stone toward on-campus engagement or

in-person community building, but as a potentially meaningful and even transformative experience in its own right (Wakeford, 2000). Some participants found online spaces after being dissatisfied with in-person spaces, such as a campus resource center or community event. All participants faced the task of managing their identities both online and offline, and online engagement did not necessarily function as a wholesale substitute for offline engagement, nor always as a venue that led to offline engagement.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

As a qualitative study, this research is specific to the participants and contexts in which they operated. This study is bounded by its context of a large, predominantly White university. Research in different contexts would expand understandings of students' identity development journeys online. Students with different disabilities and different LGBTQ identities than those in this study might access and use social media in distinct ways (Asuncion et al., 2012). Because recruitment for this study focused on broad categories of disability and LGBTQ identities, future research might address more specific identity intersections, such as those experienced by transgender students with medical disabilities, lesbians with psychological disabilities, or gay men with ADHD. Future research exploring online engagement might utilize diverse methods to collect information, such as logs and observations of students' online activities, interactions, and use of language. Online or offline focus groups might offer another venue to explore how students made meaning of online activities.

IMPLICATIONS

As noted in the findings, many students discussed online engagement related to disability as distinct from their activities related to queer identities and communities. For some students, venturing online presented the possibility for embracing an intersectional queer/disabled experience or community, which they may not have viewed as possible or even desirable in the physical campus environment. This suggests that higher education institutions ought to view online venues as another potential site for student development and community building, one that could potentially be leveraged in useful ways, particularly for students who face hostility in the campus climate. As Nicolazzo (2015) suggests, practitioners should "expand their notions of campus environments to include virtual spaces" (p. 159). This will necessitate a shift for higher education leaders who may view online spaces as always and only subordinate to physical spaces on campus, or time spent online as detracting from academic and campus engagement.

While many students described their online engagement as beneficial, social media use should be assessed critically. Though traditional college-aged students are thought of "digital natives" (Levine & Dean, 2012), they may still require extensive media literacy and education on the benefits and risks of online engagement (Varjas et al., 2013). These findings suggest implications for both faculty and student affairs educators who might seek to have candid conversations with students about online media use. Particularly since such spaces tend to be unmediated, students may benefit from the guidance of media-savvy professionals (and peers) who can help evaluate the relationship between online and offline engagement, identity disclosures online, and potential mental health implications of Internet use. Such education ought to address reflection, narration, and action online, as students will benefit from understanding both the technical capabilities of social media as well as the positive

and negative implications of sharing one's identity online in order to connect with others.

In this article I have demonstrated that students' activities online can be a site of inclusion and possibility, as well as exclusion and disappointment. Though it would be unhelpful for universities to take a paternalistic tone and simply discourage such activities online, institutions could help students realistically evaluate risks and consider long-term consequences of being unintentionally outed as LGBTQ or as having a disability, or how online activities might be traceable and identifiable over students' careers and lives. Such education must be culturally competent and address the unique identity-development concerns relevant to students with disabilities and LGBTQ students (Harper et al., 2009). Encouraging purposeful engagement with social media on campus might enhance students' social integration and sense of belonging (Kolek & Saunders, 2008).

In addition, institutions might further explore how students engage with university-sponsored online spaces and how these mediated venues might enhance students' online literacy. This study suggests that some students may be uncomfortable fully engaging offline/physical venues on campus to receive services or build community, such as student life and academic programs related to disability, gender, and sexuality. Given this, such programs might consider how they can expand their online resources beyond simply promoting offline events. Such offices might be able to leverage university resources to create new opportunities for engagement online, such as discussion and support groups, collaborative media, and peer mentoring.

CONCLUSION

In this study, students at a predominantly White research university described their experiences venturing online and engaging in various social media platforms to explore disability and queer identities. Online engagement served multiple purposes for students, as they sought and often found validation conspicuously absent in the (offline) campus community by becoming involved in forums for discussion and activism as well as meeting friends and romantic/sexual partners. Students rejected what they viewed as an antiquated notion that forming community online was not "real" and instead carefully managed their identities and intentionally curated their online presence. These findings offer implications for practitioners, as students' online lives are increasingly central to their higher education experiences, as well as for scholars interested in exploring the relatively understudied areas of social media engagement with student identity development and the experiences of queer students with disabilities.

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