

Relationship Between Usage and Age: How LGBT Individuals Use Online Social
Networking Applications For Personal Relationships

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Abstract

As technology continues to advance at phenomenal speeds, the method of transferring a message continues to change. From ancient smoke signals to Twitter, the complicated process of communication continues to evolve. One aspect of that evolution is the ongoing development of new online social networking applications. This paper will use surveys to explore how technology affects LGBT individuals and how they may utilize online social networking applications for personal relationships. Special attention is given to defining personal relationships into three categories: friendship, dating, and casual sex “hooking up.” It is my hypothesis that research may reveal a correlation between high users of online social networking applications and an increased sexual promiscuity among LGBT individuals. Furthermore, research may reveal a correlation between age and usage of online social networking applications within LGBT individuals.

Keywords: communication, LGBT, hooking up, casual sex

Relationship Between Usage and Perception of Behavior: How LGBT Individuals Use Online Social Networking Applications For Personal Relationships

“It shouldn’t be too much of a surprise that the Internet has evolved into a force strong enough to reflect the greatest hopes and fears of those who use it.” -Denise Caruso, Digital Commerce Columnist at the New York Times

The Shannon and Weaver model of communication says there are receivers, senders, and methods of transferring a message (as cited in Fournier, 2009). This early communication model focuses primarily on the sender and receiver of a message; but as technology continues to advance at phenomenal speeds, the method of transferring a message continues to be of great importance. Shannon and Weaver may not have anticipated the advent of new online social networking applications and how those applications have revolutionized the ways in which people seek out and form personal relationships. Barnes, 2003, and Parks & Floyd 1996, say “In recent years, the advent of computer - mediated messages (CMC) has increased the opportunity for people to establish and maintain new relationships on-line.”

The Internet provides a veil of anonymity, and it often serves as a refuge for minority groups seeking freedom of expression and openness in a setting perceived to be safe from the constraints of a mainstream society that may not support a particular way of life. This is especially true with the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered (LGBT) Community. The Internet allowed for the creation of a safe venue for them to connect with other similar individuals; therefore revolutionizing the way LGBT individuals can seek out personal relationships. Research supports this idea, as Sociologist Diane Wysocki (1998) examined the social element aspect of the Internet and found, “The development of the Internet in modern society has had a dramatic effect on social life.” Her research suggests the Internet has allowed users to expand their social networks,

find friends and prospective life partners, and “even fulfill their most secret sexual desires” (Wysocki, 1998).

In this study, I will seek to gather data regarding the ways in which LGBT individuals are using online social networking applications to develop personal relationships. Increases in communication technologies have changed the lens in which LGBT individuals view the world. It is my suggestion that increases in communication technologies, specifically online social networking applications have led to an increased ability to communicate and network, thus providing easier opportunities for individuals who self identify as LGBT to develop personal relationships with other LGBT individuals. Furthermore, it is my hypothesis that younger LGBT individuals may be more likely to be utilizing online social networking applications for casual sex relationships, whereas older LGBT individuals may be more likely to use online social networking applications for friendship and dating relationships.

It is my hypothesis, that among LGBT individuals, traditional sexual activity in romantic relationships has given way to a more contemporary, casual, “hooking-up” approach. While LGBT individuals may have traditionally already been involved in more casual sex relationships compared with heterosexual individuals, this research will allow us to see if new online social networking applications are increasing those relationships, while also allowing LGBT individuals utilize those same applications for more friendship and dating relationships.

This study is supported by the Uses and Gratifications approach. Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch (1974), developed the Uses and Gratifications theory that suggests people use media based on the psychological needs that motivate them to engage in certain media usage behaviors. The Uses and Gratifications theory says people are goal-oriented in their actions and patterns of behavior, and they actively seek ways of

fulfilling their needs and desires (1974).

While this theory was originally developed to examine mass media consumption, it can be applied nicely to the realm of computer- mediated communication, as other researchers have previously identified a broad range of gratifications people can gain from mediated-communication contexts (McGuire, 1974). Linn (1999) also writes that the Uses and Gratifications approach “has been considered an appropriate theoretical framework in that its principles are generally applicable to various mediated communication situations.” Therefore, it has been used to study outcomes of communication within virtually all settings, such as the Internet (LaRose & Eastin, 2004; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Song, LaRose, Eastin & Lin, 2004); and new media technologies (Newhagen & Rafaeli, 1996).

This study is important because if research shows that LGBT users are utilizing online social networking applications to form personal relationships, it will allow insight into what applications are being used and for what specific relationship types: friendship, dating, or casual sex. This will allow LGBT individuals to develop a better sense of knowledge related to the online social networking applications they are using, and allow them to target their online usage based on the type of personal relationship they are seeking. Research reflects the Uses and Gratifications Theory in regards to LGBT individuals seeking online personal relationships. Walther (1997) argued individuals use CMC to deliberately seek out new relational partners. Shaw, (1997) also states the Internet has become vital space for communication of LGBT individuals, saying it is a “space where gay relationship formation thrives,” and calls it the “new gay bar.” Shaw also notes the importance of the Internet to LGBT individuals by citing how the elements of “Fear, intimidation, age, and geographic isolation” affect LGBT’s ability to interact with other LGBT individuals in their real lives (1997).

Due to the effects of technology on the communication process, this area of research will continue to remain of high importance as new online social networking applications allow us better insight into how technology can shape the symbolic interaction of the communication process. This study may also advance the ongoing communication conversation by helping us better understand the ways in which LGBT individuals are using technology to construct their personal relationships.

Theoretical Assumptions and the Role of Communication

In this study, I will take a positivist approach to objectively study the phenomena of how LGBT individuals utilize online social media applications in choosing personal relationships. Personal relationships are defined in this proposal as friendship, dating and relationships, and casual sex relationships. A positivist approach ascertains the purpose of science is to stay with what is observable and measureable, and the goal of knowledge is to describe our experiences by observing the phenomena surrounding them. By only studying what is observable and measureable, meaning is ignored.

By applying the unique approach of the scientific method, and a positivist view of the world, my goal exists for this study to have an objective explanation of how LGBT individuals are using online social networking applications for personal relationships. A key term for positivists is the concept of objectivity, and most positivists air on the extreme when it comes to the belief that phenomena are best observed with complete objectivity. It is important to say however, that true objectivity is impossible, as all people are influenced, to some degree, by their own personal ideologies. With that stated, this proposal seeks to follow the positivist paradigm of utmost objectivity with a neutral bias and no pre-determined notions regarding the outcome of the research.

Research Question

The research questions used to guide this study are:

- RQ1: Does age affect usage of online LGBT social networking applications?**
- RQ2: Are there any associations between social networking applications and type of relationships LGBT individuals are pursuing?**
- RQ3: What is the relationship between usage of online social networking applications and casual sex relationships?**
- RQ4: How do LGBT individuals use online social networking applications for personal relationships?**

- H₁– Younger LGBT adults use social networking applications more frequently for personal relationships than older LGBT adults.**
- H₂ - High frequency users of LGBT online social networking applications engage in more casual sex relationships than less frequent users.**
- H₃– Younger LGBT adults use social networking applications to engage in more casual sex than older, less frequent users.**
- H₄ – LGBT individuals prefer usage of online social networking applications over face to face interaction when seeking to develop and maintain personal relationships.**

In sum, I will study how LGBT individuals may be using online social networking applications in how they choose personal relationships.

Literature Review

Below, I explore literature related to how individuals may use online social networking applications for personal relationships.

We Met on the Net

The website worldinternetstats.com estimates that as of March 2011 there were over 2 billion estimated Internet users worldwide. That number is equal to 30% of the world's total population. What is even potentially more significant, is the fact that those estimates reflect a percentage increase of 417% over the last decade. As Internet usage continues to increase, so does the opportunity for individuals to use the Internet as a method of seeking and developing relationships. Parks and Roberts (1998) found that over 93.6% of Internet users reported using the Internet for online relationships, with over 26% of those relationships being romantic in nature. Additional research by Anderson & Emmers-Sommer (2006) and Walther, Loh, & Granka (2005) indicates online relationships are now very common. A 2002 Nua Internet Survey found the average Internet user "Spends over 70% of his or her time online building personal relationships, including online friendships, sexual partnerships, and romances.

While Parks and Roberts (1998) found 26% of users utilizing the Internet for romantic relationships, a study of undergraduate students by Wildermuth (2000) found over 46% had been involved in an online romance. As hypothesized by this study, this prior research suggests that a relationship may exist between Internet usage and age, as younger individuals may be more likely to utilize the Internet for romantic relationships. This correlation is shown later in the results of this proposal's pilot study.

Sexual Orientation and the Internet for Online Relationships

Previous research offers some cues as to why LGBT individuals are utilizing the Internet for online relationships. While little research has been conducted regarding sexual orientation and Internet usage for online relationships, a study by McKenna and Bargh (1998), revealed sexual orientation may affect the frequency individuals use the Internet for online relationships. McKenna and Bargh demonstrated in their research the

effectiveness of the Internet as an outlet for gay men and women to “Overcome the stigmatization of homosexuality” (1998). Their study suggests Internet dating may be more important to LGBT individuals due to the limited social venues available to LGBT individuals. LGBT individuals are part of a marginalized group. Hillier, Kurdas, & Horsley say, “For people who are marginalized, the Internet has the capacity to remove barriers associated with geography, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and so on (2001). Cooper, McLoughlin, and Campbell (2000) noted in a separate study that LGBT individuals “use the Internet more often than their heterosexual counterparts for experimentation, networking, communication, and the expression of a variety of sexual behaviors.”

The Role of Technology

The role of technology can be argued as changing the social landscape for LGBT individuals. A 2009 survey of LGBT adults revealed over 70% of individuals self reported as using the Internet as “their primary means of information – seeking during sexual identity exploration” (Bond, Hefner, & Drognos). Within the study, participants noted their belief that the Internet and computer-mediated communication (CMC) was one of the most important factors in allowing them to shape their sexual identities (2009). Brown, Maycock, & Burns also show the unique appeal the Internet has to gay men because of the limited social venues they have when it comes to meeting “Without fear of negative consequences” (2005). It is important to note while traditional venues still exist as venues for LGBT to form personal relationships, the Internet serves as one distinguishing difference: anonymity without fear of reprisal (Benotsch, Kalichman, & Cage, 2002).

Importance of Examining Communication amongst College Students

Due to the importance of age on this study, it is important to look at the changing

ways in which young adults, undergraduate college students, are communicating. This is of particular importance because part of the survey participants will be gathered specifically from the University of Tennessee research pool, which consists primarily of undergraduate college students.

A 2008 study from Alabama State University examined how college students communicate. This study sought to examine how college students spend their time communicating, and what, if any impact technology and communication devices might have on that process (Emmanuel et al., 2008). Examining the ways in which college students communicate is important because the Internet and portable communication devices have inundated college campuses. Emmanuel et al. (2008) also state college students are an important group to study because they are usually the first adopters of new technology (14). They also state today's college students are the first generation to be completely raised in an environment of media technology (14). This exposure to media and technology adds another element to the communication process of college students. Bonebrake (2002) says:

Now, instant-messaging can be and often is used to set up dates with the person down the residence hall floor; podcast blogs are used to advance civic discourse; and video chat using Skype is making the telephone seem less and less smart. In the modern digital culture, the advancement of technology has broken down the assumption that technology is in a zero sum game with traditional forms of communication. The new technologies are causing the technologies of communication to converge with the uses and functions of communication (as cited in Emmanuel et al., 2008, p. 18).

Casual or Non-relational Sexual Experiences

Although sexual activity is usually examined in the context of romantic

relationships, recent attention has been given to sexual activity that occurs in casual contexts, often called “hooking up”. Paul et al. (2000) defined a hookup as a “sexual encounter which may or may not include sexual intercourse, usually occurring on only one occasion between two people who are strangers or brief acquaintances” (as cited in Epstein, Calzo, Smiler, and Ward, 2009, p. 414). Lambert, Kahn, and Apple (2003) state over three fourths of college students report having had at least one such casual sexual encounter (as cited in Epstein et al., 2008).

These statistics are replicated by other researchers. In a study of 555 undergraduate students (2000), Paul found 78 percent of college students stated they had previously hooked up and that the average college student had accumulated 10.8 hook-up partners during college (as cited in McGinn, 2004). Researchers at James Madison University found in a similar study that 77.7 percent of women and 84.2 percent of men had hooked up, “A process they said routinely involved petting below the waist, oral sex, or intercourse” (as cited in McGinn, 2004).

Role of Communication Technology in Sexual Promiscuity

The statistics above are important, because I contend that advances in communication technology have created a shift in how LGBT individuals are using online social networking applications to develop personal relationships. Advances in new social networking applications have made casual, non-relational sex more accessible, especially within the LGBT community, a community whose members may have had a harder time forming personal relationships prior to the advent of the internet and the expansion of social networking sites.

Craigslist

Craigslist is a classified ad web site used for forming various types of personal relationships. It has sections on its website titled “Casual Encounters”. Under this

section, people can post or browse internet ads for casual sex. They don't even have to create a username and password. They simply reply to the email address provided by the poster of the classified ad. Craigslist is also one of the few sites that allows users to upload x-rated pictures to their ad listings (Yan, 2009).

Grindr

Another example shows how advances in communication technology have created environments for "hooking-up". In an article titled, "There's a (Gay) App for That, Dreier describes a recently created application, named Grindr, for Apple's popular iPhone (2009). The application was created by Joel Simkhai, an online marketer from Los Angeles, who says, "I was looking for an easy way to meet other guys based on location" (as cited in Dreier, 2009). Simkhai's solution was to create an application that would utilize the GPS functionality of the iPhone to allow members to see other member's photographs and profiles based on proximity to their GPS location (2009). Members can then utilize a chat feature which allows them to communicate with other members or take and send photographs using the SMS capability and built in camera of the iPhone (as cited in Dreier, 2009). Simkhai says once you have found someone you are interested in hooking up with, you simply press the button that sends a map with your location to the other iPhone user. They then can use their iPhone mapping feature to get turn by turn directions to your location (as cited in Dreier, 2009). If that isn't enough, according to Simkhai, the best thing about this application is, "Because the phone is portable, the selection of men changes as one moves through the city (as cited in Dreier, 2009).

These few examples highlight the role that advances in communication technology and new online social networking applications has on how LGBT individuals are utilizing these applications to seek and developing personal relationships. I contend

that these technological advances in social networking applications have led to greater exposure regarding the availability of casual sex. This will only continue to increase as communication technology continues to rapidly change the way we utilize online social networking applications to develop personal relationships.

Methodology

To explore the effects of online LGBT social networking applications on personal relationships, I will conduct an in-depth quantitative study of participants who self identify as LGBT individuals. A cross-sectional survey will be available to the study participants via the World Wide Web. Because the study targets LGBT individuals and seeks to examine their usage of online social networking applications for personal relationships, it is important that the survey participants be active participants in CMC (computer mediated communication). This study will not examine face-to-face communication of LGBT individuals seeking to develop and maintain relationships with other LGBT individuals. It will focus entirely on the CMC environment. The use of the Internet as a method for collecting research data has continued to be of great interest to researchers and the success of the Internet as a method of data collection has previously been illustrated (Kiesler & Sproull, 1986; Maisel, Robinson, & Werner, 1985).

The Internet often serves as a veil of anonymity for minority or disparaged groups. Collection of data in this setting should allow for the research participants to answer truthfully and be more engaged in the study. Due to the personal nature of the questions being asked, and the group from which I am seeking information, computer-mediated methods of data collection are beneficial for this specific study. The research of Fowler, 1993, champions this method of data collection as it was indicated that computer-mediated methods of data collection have the “ability to reach relatively rare,

hidden, and geographically dispersed groups.” Individuals who identify as LGBT are often characterized within that grouping.

Instrument

A ten question survey was created using software from SurveyMonkey, an online data collection site that allows you to create, collect, and analyze research data by transferring the data results into SPSS or other data analyzing software. The survey, titled “LGBT Individuals and Use of Online Social Networking Applications for Personal Relationships,” is composed of ten questions that collect basic demographic information in addition to allowing participants to self disclose information regarding their usage of online LGBT social networking applications. Year and month of birth were the only selections that required a response. Failure to enter a response in the year and month of birth comment boxes resulted in a red error message “Cannot proceed until the following have been entered: year of birth,” or “Month of birth” depending on which item had been omitted.

The survey allows participants to indicate how they are accessing online social networking applications (via computer, I-pad or tablet, mobile device smartphone, I-pods, or other devices). In addition, it also allows participants to indicate the reasons they have used online LGBT networking applications (conversation, friendship, dating, and casual sex).

Once participants have self selected the reasons and methods of using LGBT applications, they are asked to indicate levels of agreement with several questions pertaining to satisfaction and gratification of usage. A seven point Likert scale is used ranging from 1 (Disagree Strongly) to 7 (Agree Strongly). Special consideration was given to the Likert scale, and a 7 point scale, rather than a 5 point scale, was used to

discourage participants from choosing a response that would fall right in the middle. The actual survey is as follows:

Curry -LGBT Individuals and Use of Online Social Networking Applications

LGBT Online Social Networking Applications & Usage for Personal Relatio...

All responses are anonymous and no personal identifying information is being collected in this survey. Your completion of this survey conveys your consent in this study and for your data to be used. No incentive is provided for completion and you may end the survey at any time. You may now proceed.

1. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other

*2. Please indicate the year of your birth

3. Please indicate the month of your birth

- January
- February
- March
- April
- May
- June
- July
- August
- September
- October

4. Please indicate which site you are presently using or have used in the past. (Check all that apply).

| | Using Now | Used Before | Never Used |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Match.com | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Eharmony.com | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| adultfriendfinder.com | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| gay.com | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| adam4adam.com | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| manhunt.net | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Grinder | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Craigslist.com | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Scruff | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other Site | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other Application | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Other (please specify)

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5. Please indicate how you currently access or have previously accessed online social networking applications (check all that apply).

| | Website | Mobile Device (Smartphone) | Ipad or Other Tablet | Ipod | Other |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Match.com | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Eharmony.com | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| adultfriendfinder.com | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| gay.com | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| adam4adam.com | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| manhunt.net | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Grinder | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Craigslist.com | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Scruff | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other Site or Application | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Other (please specify)

6. Please indicate what reasons you have used the following online networking applications for (Check all that apply).

| | Conversation | Friendship | Dating | Casual Sex: "Hooking up" |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Match.com | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Eharmony.com | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| adultfriendfinder.com | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| gay.com | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| adam4adam.com | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| manhunt.net | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Grinder | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Craigslist.com | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Scruff | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other Site or Application | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Other (please specify)

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7. For the next set of questions, please indicate your agreement with the following statements:

"These applications meet my needs" (boredom, friendship, dating, casual sex: "hooking up").

1 Disagree Strongly
 2
 3
 4
 5
 6
 7 Agree Strongly

8. "Using online LGBT social networking applications make my life better."

1 Disagree Strongly
 2
 3
 4
 5
 6
 7 Agree Strongly

9. "I feel that LGBT online social networking applications make it much easier for LGBT individuals to meet other similar people."

1 Disagree Strongly
 2
 3
 4
 5
 6
 7 Agree Strongly

10. Please indicate which method you feel is more successful in seeking and developing personal relationships (friendship, dating, casual sex).

- Face to Face Interactions
 Online Social Networking Applications

Participants

For the proposed full study, I will conduct a quantitative study of at least 200 participants. A sample of $N=200$, or above, is preferred as it lowers the possibility of committing Type I error; however, it may be difficult to identify a sample of greater than 200 due to the population sample that is being studied. Research participants will be gathered from the usage of the University of Tennessee student research pool, as well as LGBT community resources. Usage of the university research pool will give access to participants who are generally younger individuals who self identify as LGBT, while utilizing LGBT community resources will give access to a broader range and age of LGBT individuals outside of an academic and collegiate setting. This mix of research participants will be integral in examining whether or not a correlation exists between age and usage, and age and type of relationships being sought through the usage of online social networking applications. This mixture in data collection will also show how monolithic the LGBT community may be in their usage of online social applications. The participants for the pilot study were obtained solely from the LGBT community and are described in the pilot study results section.

Procedure

I will utilize anonymous surveys, to encourage honest and truthful feedback. A condition of anonymity will present the strongest case for reliability and validity, as people may not feel comfortable participating in a study that includes self reporting sexual behavior if they feel the results were being recorded with their personal information. Operating on any condition other than anonymity may produce feelings of anxiety or guilt arising from the expression of sexual activities, resulting in dishonest communication on the survey

The first step in the recruitment of participants was to identify the places where

appropriate participants for the sample population could be found. In looking at computer-mediated communication, choosing an online survey was purposive in that the LGBT online community represents the most appropriate population of which to choose a sample.

After identifying the LGBT online community as an appropriate place of participant recruitment, the next step was to recruit participants by finding specific places to post a call for participants. An announcement with a brief explanation of the proposed study was placed in an open forum on the website of the HRC (Human Rights Campaign), an organization that champions for LGBT rights. I was contacted a day later by an HRC member who authorized me to post the link to the survey on their site.

Because an online version of the survey had already been constructed, all I had to do was post the hyperlink to the URL of the survey website. Once the hyperlink was posted, individuals could then click the link from the HRC website and be taken directly to the survey. Prior to starting the survey, participants had to navigate the introduction page that contained an “Informed Consent” clause that stated:

“All responses are anonymous and no personal identifying information is being collected in this survey. Your completion of this survey conveys your consent in this study and for your data to be used. No incentive is provided for completion and you may end the survey at any time. You may now proceed.”

Participants were then able to click the link to begin the survey. Data for this research were obtained from a self-directed survey administered on an online webpage.

Since the entire survey was online, each question had corresponding answer choices that could be chosen by “clicking” the desired response with their mouse cursor. Participants also had the ability to navigate the survey by clicking a “back” or “next” button. When the participants completed the survey they indicated so by clicking a

“done” button and then taken to a page where they clicked a button to “exit survey.”

Due to the sensitivity of the population sample, no personal data was collected or retained. An IP (Internet Protocol) address, time and date of completion were the only items recorded. Participants were not asked for any identifying information such as name or email addresses, etc. To ensure no person completed the survey more than once, the IP addresses were compared to look for duplicity. When duplicated IP addresses were found, the corresponding data from that survey were omitted from any data analysis. As a result, one duplicated IP address resulted in one survey being discarded.

Pilot Study

Pilot Study Participants

Forty-nine participants (N=49) took part in this pilot study. The average age was 34.1 (SD = 12.58) with ages ranging from 18.4 to 66.7 years old. The median was 29.90 with a mode of 27.10. 46 participants were male and 3 participants were female. All participants reported using online LGBT social networking applications for personal relationships.

Statistics

| Age | | |
|----------------|---------|----------|
| N | Valid | 49 |
| | Missing | 0 |
| Mean | | 34.1227 |
| Median | | 29.9000 |
| Mode | | 27.10 |
| Std. Deviation | | 12.58025 |
| Range | | 48.30 |
| Minimum | | 18.40 |
| Maximum | | 66.70 |

Results

Hypothesis One

Hypothesis one called for a negative relationship between age and frequency of use of social networking applications for personal relationships. Hypothesis one was supported, as a Pearson correlation showed a sizeable, negative, significant relationship between age and frequency of use of social networking applications, $r = -.56$, $p < .001$.

Hypothesis Two

Hypothesis two called for a positive relationship between frequency of use of online social networking applications and frequency of casual sex relationships.

Hypothesis one was supported, $r = .608$, $p < .01$.

Correlations

| | | Usage of Applications | Used for Sex |
|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| Usage of Applications | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .608** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 |
| | N | 49 | 49 |
| Used for Sex | Pearson Correlation | .608** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | |
| | N | 49 | 49 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Hypothesis Three

Hypothesis three called for a negative relationship between Age of individuals and an Increased Usage of social networking applications. Hypothesis three was supported, $r = -.21$, $p < .05$.

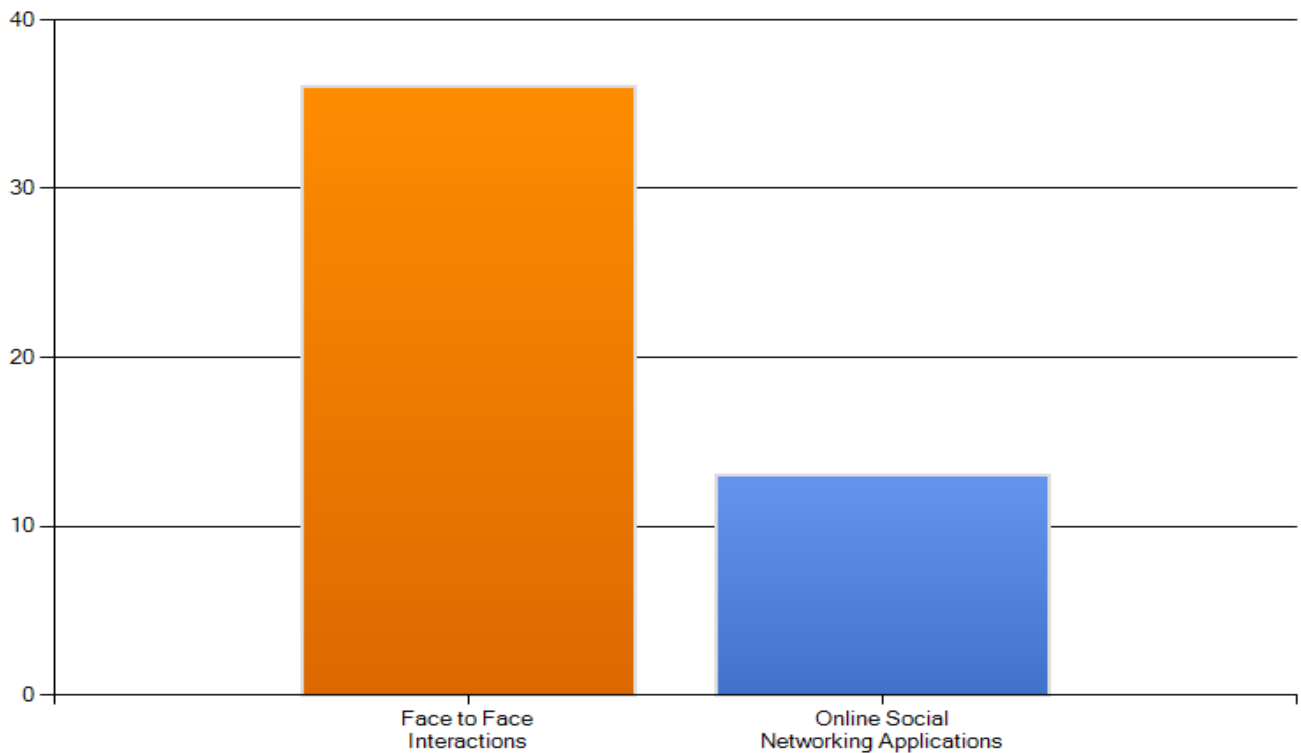
Hypothesis Four

Hypothesis four called for LGBT individuals to feel online social networking applications are more successful over face to face interaction when in seeking and developing personal relationships. Hypothesis four was not significant.

Discussion

The pilot study showed significant results to move forward to a full research study. All three hypothesis regarding individual's usage of online LGBT social networking applications were supported by the findings. The fourth hypothesis, while not supported, did provide important feedback related to LGBT individual's preference of traditional face to face interaction when seeking and developing personal relationships. Surprisingly, 36 of the 49 participants (73.5%) indicated they feel face to face interactions are more successful in seeking and developing personal relationships.

Please indicate which method you feel is more successful in seeking and developing personal relationships (friendship, dating, casual sex).

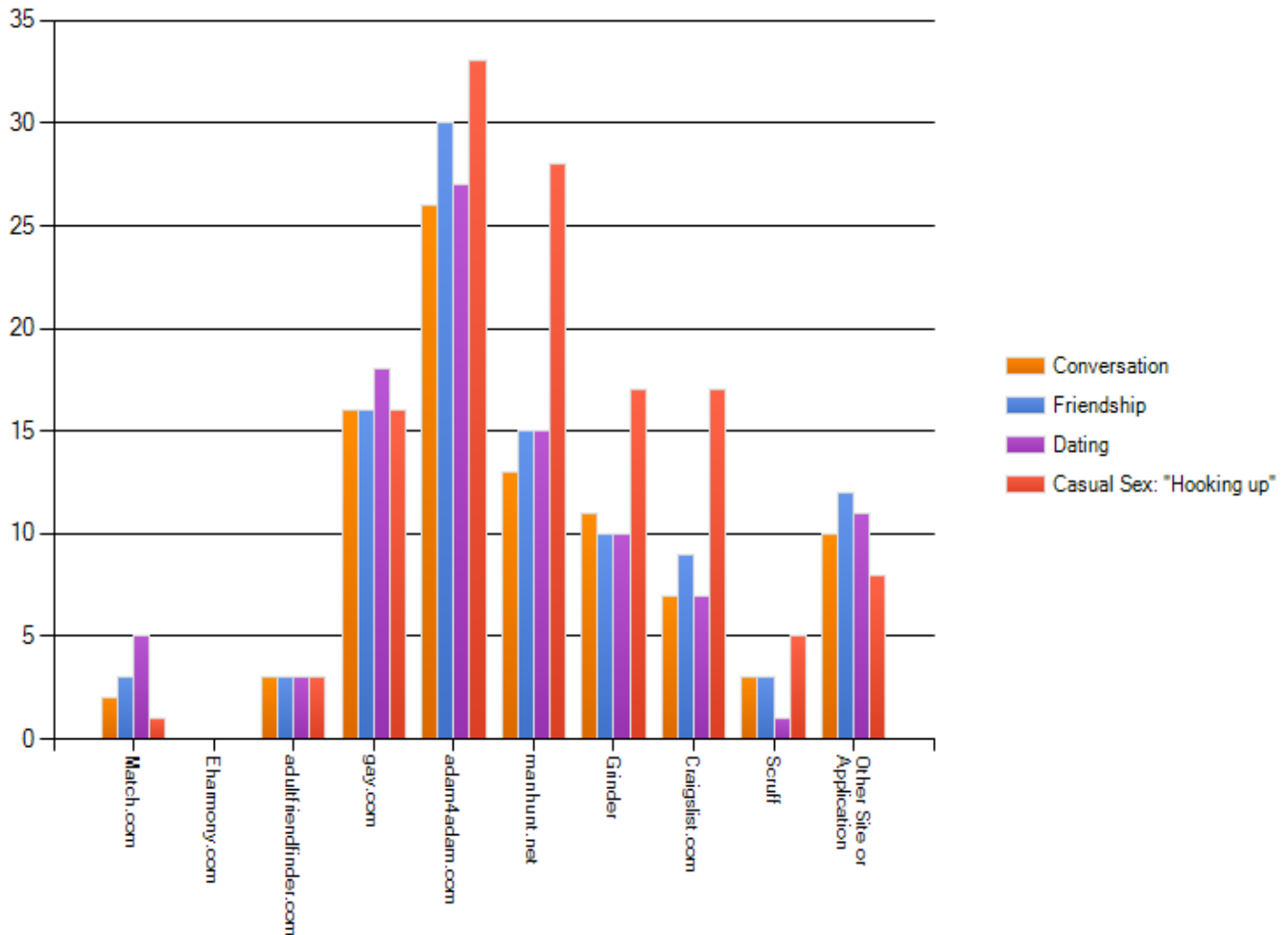


This seems to be contradictory to the participants overwhelming responses indicating that they feel LGBT online social networking applications make it much easier for LGBT

individuals to meet other similar people. Overwhelmingly, 80.9% of all participants agreed online social networking applications make it much easier for LGBT individuals to meet other similar people. 8.5% were neutral, and only 10.7% of participants disagreed with the statement. So while this seems to contradict participant beliefs that face to face is still the more successful method for seeking and maintaining personal relationships, it may be possible they are indicating face to face is the preferred method once they have used online social networking applications to make the initial connection. This would be consistent with research that indicates face to face relationships are easier to maintain versus CMC.

The pilot study also produced other interesting findings, including patterns of social networking usage for different reasons. As indicated in the attached chart, participants indicate Match.com to be used primarily for dating, then friendship, then conversation, and lastly, for casual sex relationships. Adultfriendfinder.com and gay.com, were reported to be used almost evenly for all four classifications of personal relationships, “conversation, friendship, dating, and casual sex.” Other applications like Grindr, and networks like Manhunt.net, Adam4adam.com, and Craigslist.com were reported by participants to be primarily used for casual sex relationships.

Please indicate what reasons you have used the following online networking applications for (Check all that apply).



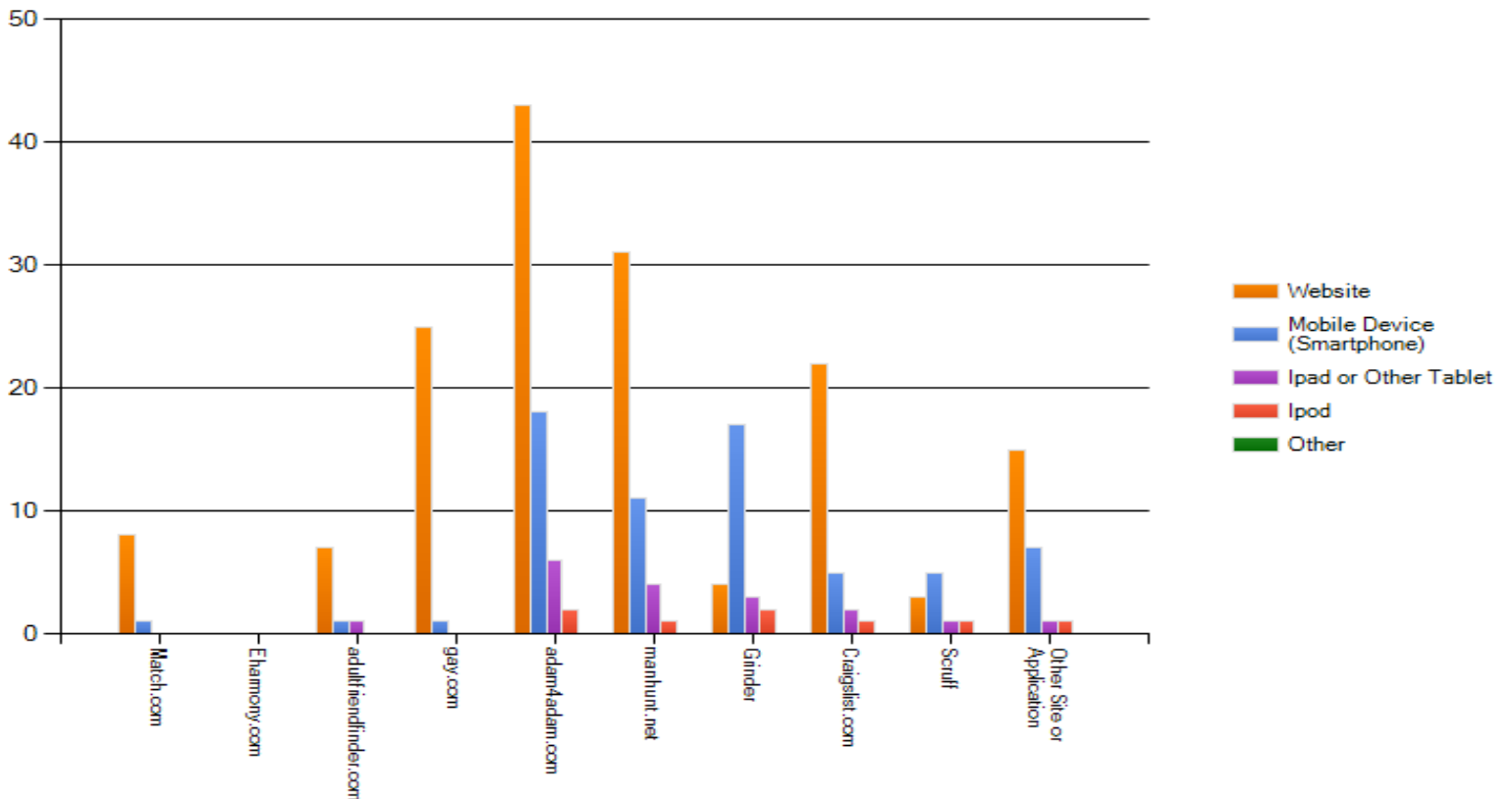
A final interesting aspect of the pilot study was to see the self reported technologies in which LGBT individuals are using to access online social networking applications. LGBT individuals are utilizing all forms of technologies to meet their needs in seeking and developing personal relationships. Everything from the Internet, as expected, to high levels of smartphone usage, to the usage of I-pads and I-pods. It is clear that new communication technologies and the Internet have changed the way in

which LGBT individuals are able to communicate and meet other similar individuals. The ramifications of this are significant. No longer are gay men and women forced to live in secrecy, hiding who they really are, and having few venues of meeting others like them. In today’s world, relationships with other LGBT individuals: either conversation, friendship, dating, or casual sex, is only a mouse click away. The playing field has been equalized. LGBT individuals can now meet others with the same ease and frequency of their heterosexual counterparts.

Further Research

Areas of further research are almost limitless in relation to this topic. One specific area would be to break up the relationship aspect of personal relationships into “developing relationships” and “maintaining relationships.” Looking at the relational aspects separately may give further clarification as to which online social networking sites are used for which purposes. As indicated by the pilot study data, some sites and

Please indicate how you currently access or have previously accessed online social networking applications (check all that apply).



online social networking applications may be better suited to maintaining relationships than in developing them, and vice-versa. Future research could also examine online social networking applications and usage from heterosexuals and see if the same correlations exist that are present with LGBT individuals. If differences exist, it would be interesting to see where those differences lay and if for what reasons they are different. A qualitative study might be a good way of getting more in depth feedback from participants regarding why they feel online social networking applications are making it easier for them to meet other similar individuals.

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