

YOUTUBE VLOGS, STARDOM AND LGBTQ COMMUNITY

A Master's Thesis

by

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Ankara

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To all the brave people out there...

YOUTUBE VLOGS, STARDOM AND LGBTQ COMMUNITY

The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences

of

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by

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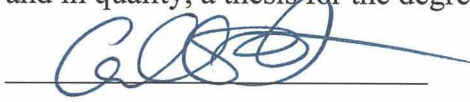
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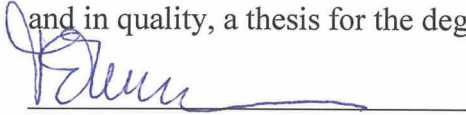
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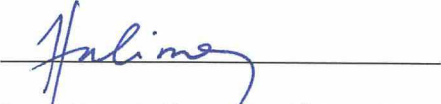
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ABSTRACT

YOUTUBE VLOGS, STARDOM AND LGBTQ COMMUNITY

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This thesis analyzes the rising importance of YouTube vlogs and vloggers against mainstream media organs in terms of self-representation and affiliation. The research specifically focuses on LGBTQ individuals' sexual identity and communication development created by coming out videos while establishing visibility and acculturation for the LGBTQ community through the discourse being used. The study also shows YouTube's potential power to produce online stars as a role model for the audience and the ways these stars use their stardom power to raise more awareness on the LGBTQ issues.

Keywords: Coming out, LGBTQ, Visibility, Vlog, YouTube

ÖZET

YOUTUBE VLOGLARI, YILDIZLIK VE LGBTQ TOPLULUĞU

Gürsoy, Cihan Akın

Yüksek Lisans, Medya ve Görsel Çalışmalar

Danışman: Yrd. Doç. Dr. Ahmet Gürata

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Bu tez, öz-temsili ve yakınlık kurma konularında YouTube vloglarının ve vloggerların, ana akım medya karşısındaki artan önemini araştırmaktadır. Araştırma, özellikle, LGBTQ kişilerin açılma videolarında kullanılan söylemler aracılığıyla edindiği görünürlük ve kültürleşme faktörleri üzerinden ortaya çıkan cinsel kimlik ve iletişim gelişimine odaklanıyor. Bu çalışma aynı zamanda, YouTube'un izleyiciler için rol modeli haline gelen internet ünlüsü üretme potansiyelini ve bu yıldızların LGBTQ farkındalığını daha da artırmak için şöhretlerinin beraberinde getirdiği gücü hangi şekillerde kullandıklarını açıklıyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Açılma, Görünürlük, LGBTQ, Vlog, YouTube

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ÖZET	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2: VLOG: A REVIEW	9
2.1 What is a Vlog?	9
2.2 Videos of Affinity	15
2.3 The Evolution of the Mainstream Media with Vloggers on YouTube	21
CHAPTER 3 THE RISE OF ONLINE LGBTQ PARTICIPATORY CULTURE ..	28
3.1 The Stages of LGBTQ Identity Development	28
3.2 The Visibility Issue of the LGBTQ Community	32
3.3 Shared Discourse in Coming Out Videos	44
3.3.1 It Gets Better Project: The Rhetoric Movement	50
CHAPTER 4 LGBTQ VLOGGERS' RISE TO STARDOM	54
4.1 YouTube Stardom	54
4.2 From Coming Out to Stardom: LGBTQ Stars on YouTube	61
CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION	76
BIBLIOGRAPHY	81

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. A screenshot of the cover of the Connor Franta's coming out video which was viewed over 11 million times.....	40
Figure 2. A graphic of the number of coming out videos uploaded by month.	44
Figure 3. A screenshot of the cover of the video titled 100 Different Ways to Come Out.....	47
Figure 4. A screenshot of the cover of the video titled When to Come Out - Ask Meg	48
Figure 5. The first 8 people on the survey provided by Variety.	59
Figure 6. The screenshot of the tweet sent by Ricky Martin.	65
Figure 7. The photograph from Michelle Obama and Tyler Oakley's interview.	66
Figure 8. The photograph from Tyler Oakley's appearance on the Ellen DeGeneres Show.....	67
Figure 9. The screenshots of two of the most liked comments below the I Am Transgender.....	70
Figure 10. The before and after images of Gigi Gorgeous.	70
Figure 11. The screenshot of the number of the liked, dislikes and views of the video Tom Daley: Something I want to say.....	72
Figure 12. The screenshot of one of the negative comments and the reaction it got below the video Tom Daley: Something I want to say... ..	72
Figure 13. The screenshot of the cover of the video Tom Daley and Dustin Lance Black's Wedding Video.....	74

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

The social media refers to the group of online channels devoted to group-based information, communication, content sharing and collaboration. Thanks to the rapid development of the Internet, we now have a great number of platforms through which we can express our feelings or gain information immediately. Like e-mails, instant messaging applications, social media platforms and web pages, blogs are also one of these platforms used by millions of people on a daily basis transferring information by constructing networks and relationships in the blog world. Blogs started to appear as written texts, commonly describing personal activities, but then with the help of photo-blogs and development of sound and video, this genre evolved into video blogs (vlogs) by combining basic blogging features with the high level of expression capacity found in videos. As defined by Wen Gao in *Vlogging: A Survey of Videoblogging Technology on the Web*, video blogging, mostly called vlogging, is the type of blogging in which the medium is *video* (Gao, Tian, Huang & Yang, 2010).

Vloggers are ordinary people like everybody else and this naturalness gives their reviews and opinions a sense of honesty and authenticity that traditional media might

struggle to convey. They are aspirational but relatable, which is what makes them so popular and influential. It is interesting how amusing it is just to watch someone, whom you do not even know in person, going shopping at a grocery store, talking about their hobbies, or most of the time doing nothing special because it is about their daily lives.

As Patricia Lange points out in *Videos of Affinity on YouTube*, LGBTQ vloggers' audience basically wants to be a part of their lives and they need to feel somehow connected to the vlogger. Viewers even tell them what to or what not to do in the comment section such as "kiss him" or "wear that blue shirt" etc. It is a crucial point for the audience who follows LGBTQ vloggers since some of them are living in the closet and are not able to act as who they are. This is the main reason why an affinity or attraction occurs between the audience and the vloggers, who express their sexuality without interference or a restriction; they even get millions of viewers on YouTube because of the way they live, and this has provided others with the courage and inspiration to come out to their families and friends, on or off the internet (2009).

This connection works as the same way as stardom does, and vloggers are stars of their own YouTube universe. As Lee Marshall mentions in *The Structural Functions of Stardom in the Recording Industry*, with a brief definition, the term star refers to someone who gains a great amount of attention because of her/his success or extreme talent in a particular field. It can be music, science, sports or movies, etc. Even though LGBTQ YouTube personalities might not have a "talent", they have the courage and freedom to be able to be the voice of millions, which makes them a star-like figure, because if someone is a star, that means s/he has something special that no one else has. In this case, these vloggers are also stars; they have what their

viewers do not: full identity (Marshall, 2013). Though, now YouTube is capable of producing stars from almost every vlog genre, the main focus will be on YouTube's LGBTQ vlogger stars.

Since these vlogs are mostly produced by people who live in Europe or in the United States, where people are much more tolerant to homosexuality as Christopher Pullen points out in the *LGBTQ Transnational Identity and the Media* that the construction of the LGBTQ identity is being perceived as a creation of the western world by the many cultures in the world. He states that the reason why there are lots of viewers who are the non-Western is that in some cultures, people regard homosexuality as a western ideal, a Western influence or disease, and as endorsing Western ideals of gay identity. Therefore, these videos become an escape for those who live under politic or social pressure, because of the patriarchy (Pullen, 2012). For this reason, coming out culture is more developed and deep in the West as a very prominent part of the LGBTQ culture. Although the purpose of this thesis is not to specifically examine American or the western LGBTQ vloggers; I use Anglophone coming out videos as the case study in my thesis because the most remarkable examples are recorded by western vloggers, and unfortunately, but not surprisingly, there is not any Turkish coming out examples.

In this thesis, the main focus will be on analyzing the messages, advices, and experiences conveyed through coming out videos by LGBTQ vloggers and also the YouTube genre of coming out, which is one of the most popular online video categories nowadays along with other genres such as comedy, gaming, educational and product review videos, will be categorized under two subgenres: one, where the vlogger comes out in front of the camera to viewers and two where a vlogger talks

about his/her own coming out experience and encourages others to do the same. The number of vlogs and vloggers have increased due to the use and proliferation of YouTube, the most popular video site that lets its users upload, tag and share almost any kind of video clips. This potentially helps them to be known around the world, and the latest vlogger trend is distributing videos about their everyday lives to the public, on a daily basis, as a video diary. There are thousands of vlogs on different content such as make up tutorials, travel journals, and games. Recently, within a very large YouTube group, one of the most eye-catching and dynamic groups of vloggers are LGBTQ¹ people, who not only share their personal life, but also come out to their viewers. Some of the YouTubers even record themselves while coming out to their parents or friends. As so many vloggers come out on YouTube, it gives other suppressed LGBTQ people inspiration and courage to come out, with or without posting a video on YouTube. Moreover, these videos not only help LGBTQ youth, but they also expose the negative or positive perspectives of how other families react to their children when they come out.

The desire to watch and make LGBTQ vlogs is also associated with the idea of *visibility*. Obviously, the coming out videos of the LGBTQ community that gain hundreds of thousands of viewers daily, bring visibility to a very critical controversy: the representation of gays and lesbians in the mainstream media (Dow, 2001). In *Queer Youth and Media Cultures*, Christopher Pullen states that YouTube vlogs' visibility works in two ways: viewers see diverse representations of queerness and LGBTQ vloggers, and those who use vlogs to make themselves visible and 'real' in a heterogenetic community. Therefore, in order to be more 'visible' vloggers usually

¹ The initialism stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender.

choose video titles like: ‘Coming Out’, ‘Coming Out Lesbian’, and ‘My Coming Out Story’ ironically normalizing the stereotypes and discrimination that most of the LGBTQ community have to endure in their everyday lives (Pullen, 2014).

The aim of this thesis is to illustrate the reasons behind the need to make a coming out video on YouTube, and how and why vlogs become a means of acculturation for LGBTQ youth. In doing so, this thesis examines the perspectives of LGBTQ youth who cannot build their own identity in their daily lives but can create one with the help of the videos they watch online. Since the importance and numbers of coming out videos are increasing every day, the major motivation behind this thesis is to examine how coming out videos find themselves a place in modern gender identification process and queer theory.

The other aim of this thesis is to compare cinema and TV characters, and the need for LGBTQ vloggers to relate to actual role-models, rather than fictional characters, in order to construct a culture which is not taken from a script. Though most of the video posted by LGBTQ vloggers are about their daily lives or fashion, their coming out videos become their breakout points elevating them to stardom. Some of the important coming out videos of famous LGBTQ vloggers aged between twenty and thirty will be the case study of this thesis. Since coming out videos are still considered as a research subject which has not been thoroughly explored, with its originality; this thesis will contribute to researches on LGBTQ identity development through coming out vlogs and the understanding of LGBTQ stardom. This research will also be the first case study to analyze the relationship between LGBTQ and YouTube, in Turkey

The methodology used in my thesis is the content analysis to analyze the conventions of vlogs in order to answer questions on identity on two levels: description and interpretation. Descriptive questions focus on what literally a vlog means and what it contains, while interpretative questions, which are required, focus on what the contents of coming out videos mean to viewers and how they affect them, through a deep reading of the comment section of vlogs (reviewing them based on positive and negative discourses concerning the creator of the video). I chose to mention openly gay people like Tyler Oakley or Tom Daley not only because of the enormous number of followers they have on social media, but also due to the attention they brought to coming out issues.

The second chapter examines the vlog as a new medium and the contribution of digital and visual storytelling to the video diary process while analyzing the motivations behind watching and making coming out videos while presents a background on some specific technical and communicational aspects that make online videos a vlog. Vlogs did not suddenly become a source for people to share their experiences or views with others; they are actually the latest step of the evolution process of mainstream media. People have been watching TV for many years, but eventually it is losing its power against YouTube because of the restrictions inherited by the traditional mainstream media. This chapter explains why vlogs have become such an effective tool.

The third chapter, before going into the deep analysis of the collective LGBTQ identity development through visibility and acculturation, begins with the ways how LGBTQ identity is being developed. For this reason, I will use Troiden's Homosexual Identity Development model which he presents in four stages (1993) as

my theoretical framework. Even though there are more LGBTQ characters in cinema and TV that deal with queer issues much better than in the past in terms of visibility, audiences sometimes struggle to make a connection with scripted characters.

Moreover, coming out vlogs not only help people who wish to come out of the closet, but they also show society that there is nothing abnormal with their personalities or states of mind by exposing their personal lives to millions of people. Moreover, the authenticity viewers find in vloggers' real-life stories creates an affinity between viewers and vloggers through shared discourse. This is why this thesis mainly focuses on LGBTQ visibility and acculturation on YouTube, rather than in cinema or TV series.

The fourth chapter analyzes famous LGBTQ YouTubers and their impact as the case study of this thesis using the methodological background mentioned in the previous two chapters and the notion of stardom. A close reading of the coming out practices on YouTube (such as media attention, the number of viewers they get, the way they express their sexual orientation, and how this attention brings visibility to LGBTQ people and culture) are included in the analysis. This chapter will also focus on the most prominent LGBTQ vloggers' coming out videos that made the headlines either for their viewer numbers or the enormous cultural effect they created, especially those whose successful YouTube career turned into YouTube stardom with a Hollywood star-like visibility.

Since thousands of videos appear when one types 'coming out' in YouTube's search bar, I specifically analyzed vloggers who have the most subscribers, and whose coming out videos has been viewed the most, by at least a million times. Some of

them were even included on Time magazine's "The 30 Most Influential People on the Internet" list (Time, 2015; Out Magazine, 2015).



CHAPTER 2:

VLOG: A REVIEW

YouTube has gained so much importance in our everyday and vlogs are playing a very important role for YouTube. Vlogging has become one of the biggest video genres on YouTube alongside music, how-to and product review videos, but also some successful vloggers have as many subscribers as worldwide famous musicians and other artists.

2.1 What is a Vlog?

In recent years, whenever a different online application is developed, a different type of medium appears. There are Pinterest, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram and Snapchat, and these social networking sites bring new types of self-awareness and new approaches in pondering one's self in connection to the other people while new methods of relating ourselves to others rises. Users share photographs and tag friends on Instagram, post their status, join social groups, and play hundreds of games on Facebook and follow people they are interested in while writing about their thoughts, advices and experiences on blogs. Even though it seems like there are already too many social media applications in use, actually these are not the only mediums that can be used to express one's self. Now there are better approaches to think about

users' identity, which offer new types of social mirrors to understand who they really are. Furthermore, the users got used to the benefits of the technology and their rapid evolution over time, but they still have difficulty in keeping up with the new types of sudden self-awareness (Lambert, 2013).

Lately, almost everyone can follow the production line of digital multimedia content and because of that, the amount of digital multimedia shared on the Web has grown tremendously. Therefore, various types of blogs have come to light, such as art blogs (a blog format which is sharing or publishing an art piece); photoblog (a blog that narrates the story through photos); sketchblog (a blog contains a portfolio of sketches); and especially audioblog (a podcast) and videoblog (a vlog). They vary not only in terms of their content type, but also in the way that the content is presented to the viewers or the readers. The difference between a vlog and video podcast is that a vlog is a video where people shares sections from their life, while a video podcast is like a radio show supported by video (Knapp, 2012).

Vlog is the evolved form of blogging, which uses video rather than the written word as its medium. It is basically a video documentation of a random person's habits, daily life, opinions, hobbies or any topic that the creator of the vlog wants to talk about, and these topics can be entertaining, educational or informational. Since the vlogs has no boundaries, the video maker can talk about anything in his/her mind. Vlogs can be shot with any type of camera such as a webcam, a cell phone or a movie camera, as long as the video maker delivers his/her speech, which is structured as a monologue, to the online audience. Vlogs can also be called video blogs, v-blogs, movie blogs, videocasts or v-casts and so on. While the person who creates a vlog is called vlogger or video blogger; this process is called vlogging or video

blogging. The term vlogosphere, derived from blogosphere, collectively refers to all types of vlogs the social network community they have built. A vlog comes into existence into three steps, and the first is producing the material (Gao, Tian, Huang & Yang, 2010).

In this step, the vlogger shoots and arranges the video and then uploads it to the internet. Occasionally, a video can be edited online without using an application on a computer. The second step is posting. As the new video blog is shared on the internet, it starts to be viewed on the vlogosphere. During this step, a vlog can be commented on and shared by other vloggers or viewers and instead of not trying to lose the link of a vlog, users can subscribe to any vloggers' personal page to get the notifications whenever a new vlog is uploaded. The third and the final step is archiving. In this step, the vlogger decides what to do with the vlog. It can stay on his/her own page as an archive or it can be deleted if the vlogger does not find it useful anymore (Gao, Tian, Huang & Yang, 2010).

Vlogs are uploaded in a reverse chronological order, so viewers always see the latest video a vlogger uploaded when they check their profiles out (Blood, 2002). They can be classified into two categories, in relation to the method they use to present the context: as Web-TV show or as a diary. The Web-TV show type of vlog is more professional since it is much more structured and –probably- recorded in a studio and sponsors or commercials may be included in it; while the diary type of video blog is a video recorded by the vlogger him/herself which is posted on the internet to be viewed by its audience and this thesis will focus on the diary type of vlogs (Gao, Tian, Huang & Yang, 2010). The best example for Web-TV show type is the videos used for Barack Obama's 2012 presidential campaign on YouTube.

Today, blogs are seen as a limited textual activity since text is just one aspect of the various skills required to handle and understand the diverse forms of present-day communication tools (Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht & Swartz, 2004). Video blogs create a much more effective cyber environment for vloggers than text-based online journals (blogs or weblogs) in which to communicate with millions of people, because a video can display significantly more content and being able to express thoughts and emotions through a video captures especially young viewers, who almost all the time have technological devices at their fingertips like cell phones, tablets and PCs. If a vlog is not uploaded to a video-sharing website such as YouTube, Vimeo or Dailymotion, it can also be embedded as a video or a link on a website while supported by a text, a photograph or any other cyber data. These vlogs can be shot at home or outdoors and be spontaneous or staged (Gao, Tian, Huang & Yang, 2010).

The first vlog in history is a video uploaded by Adam Kontras in 2000 which was posted alongside his blog text. The vlog, called *The Journey*, contains the footage of his move from Ohio to California. It also became the longest running vlog in history of the Internet (Kaminsky, 2010). The number of vlogs and vloggers have increased due to the proliferation of YouTube, the most popular video site that lets its users to upload, tag and share almost any kinds of videos which help them to be seen around the world and the last vlogger trend is distributing videos about their everyday life to public, on a daily basis as a video diary. As Michael Wesch mentions:

Like a soliloquy shouted into the ether or a message in a bottle set adrift at sea, these vlogs have no specific addressee. They are meant for anybody and everybody, or possibly nobody—not addressed to anyone in particular—or perhaps only vaguely addressed to “the YouTube community.” They are videos of people sitting alone in front of their webcams and just talking to anybody and everybody who care to click on their video. These vloggers talk

about their day, their problems, their accomplishments, their hopes, dreams, and fears. (2009: 21)

Despite the fact that vlogging is pushing the limits of online self-expression and self-representation by using the advantages of current technology, video blogs were not always as accessible or practical as they are now thanks to the improvements in video sharing technology especially after the launch of YouTube. Even though vlogging still stays as a barely explored research subject, academic studies have started to analyze the online video practices (Biel, 2013).

When vlogging first came out, they were mostly videos that accompanied text blogs, because videos were shared as an external link in addition to the main text. Even though the videos discuss and deal with the subjects as a regular video diary, the contents presented in the videos were always explained and explored via text. This might have been the result of the existing text-based blogging trend and technological inadequacy at that time, thus it was really far away from the social media experience we have nowadays.

According to Conrad Parker and Pfeiffer, there were some major problems with vlogging which made viewers feel unsatisfied and one of them was lack of the comment section. While readers can comment on the blog entries, it was not easy to provide feedback for other viewers or for the video maker. Videos existed only as links, not as a video page so when someone wanted to watch a vlog they either had to download it or open it on a new tab. Second problem was about the search engines because there was not any specific search engine for the video blogs. Even though the search engines were able to find a text page thanks to its author and identified keywords, this option was inefficient for the video blogs if the creator of the video did not give any textual explanation or information about the video as a metadata.

The third problem was the aggregation of video blogs. Auto-aggregation ensures that users can see the updates (Parker & Pfeiffer, 2005).

Furthermore, vlogs have some specific technical aspects. Though it can be recorded with any type of camera, using a camera with high quality is very important, especially if the vloggers wish to reach so many people through a screen. Second important tool to use while filming is light. To be seem more professional, many vloggers use lighting kits while shooting indoors, instead of natural sun light or fluorescent. Microphone is the other important gadget since vloggers communicating by talking, being sure their voice is transmitted properly is important. The fourth and the last most important tool while shooting a vlog is a computer with a very powerful editing software on it. The more editing skills a vlogger has, the more beautiful and professional-looking vlogs they can produce and attract more attention (DailyTekk, 2016).

However, now thanks to YouTube, vlogging experience is more powerful and effective because we can stay completely in the video domain, without hyperlinks or search engines that need textual introductions, and the videos are now of much higher quality. YouTube is there we want to watch a video as long as we are connected to the internet. Even though sharing vlogs is not exclusive to YouTube, the opportunities offered by YouTube to create social communications turned it into a creativity and interaction platform. Vlogs have been the dominant content type generated by users which generated the 40% of the most viewed and discussed videos (Biel, 2010). The study of vlogs, their introduction and institutionalization process evolved through YouTube. In order to analyze the deep connection between vlogs and YouTube, I will focus on their relationship in the next two subchapters.

2.2 Videos of Affinity

According to Anthropologist Bonnie Nardi, affinity means the connection between people and someone or something which is created by the shared feeling and willingness to interact with other people or things. Affinity can be gained through socially bonding exercises by making people feel connected to each other while preparing them for further interactions. Though affinity might occur towards anyone or anything, in this chapter the main focus will be on the affinity towards videos, especially YouTube (2005).

The term ‘affinity spaces’ was originally invented and used in the paper called *Semiotic Social Spaces and Affinity Space* by James Paul Gee who is a psychologist and linguist. He proposes that affinity spaces should be the center of the discussion in order to understand the current forms of digital social connections, instead of communities formed by different individuals. These communities usually constructed by random people that have different interests or goals but still end up coming together in the same place by chance, such as classrooms. X and Y are the students in the same math class but while the X is really passionate about math, Y might join the class just to pass the course with an average grade (2005).

An affinity space is about learning and exchanging information, so this place might be a guitar course or computer room where people learn coding. The importance of a place may vary from people to people but the mutual point is the common taste of the people who come together for such activities in the same ‘affinity space’ and in affinity spaces, people are primarily concerned with each other not in terms of race, sex, age, disability, social class or educational level but in terms of similar interests, endeavors, aims, habits or personal characteristics as long as they do not want to

reveal the personal details about themselves. This prevents other users or the video makers to build a stereotype against to one another. Each user is allowed to engage as he or she chooses, and both the experienced and the beginner ones are equal participants in the affinity space (Gee, 2005).

Gee also proposes that nowadays it is almost impossible talking about affinity spaces without digital and online world and gives an example of online multiplayer gaming platforms. It is an indisputable fact that some people are fond of such games and some do not care about them at all. For example, when two or more people play a war game with each other they no longer have to be in the same country let alone the same room to be in the same 'space'. They can identify their characters with the way they create their physical appearances. This digital environment turns into a total affinity space where people with the same taste communicate with and enjoy each other's company. People who are fond of these kinds of games can talk not only about games but also about the magazines and internet news about them (2005).

While Gee uses online games to explain affinity spaces, nowadays online videos are the best medium to observe the affinity as they are one of the most popular and effective communication and content creation tools. In her ethnographic research on YouTube which lasted for two years, Patricia Lange has tried to analyze how communicating through visual contents on YouTube creates the affinity and states that:

Videos of affinity attempt to maintain feelings of connection with potential others who identify or interpellate themselves as intended viewers of the video. The interpellative process is important because attention, at a basic interactional level, is a managed achievement that requires work. (2009: 71)

First of all, videos of affinity do not have to contain a topic for general audiences because mostly outcast people who want to feel socially engaged and connected one way or another with the content, message or video maker. The content usually might not be authentic or amusing, but it absolutely can be. Probably the biggest reason for vlogs to be able to attract unexpected numbers of viewers is that it creates a type of ‘home-made communication through videos between not only the specific people but also the people from specific social networks. Again, as Patricia Lange states: “videos of affinity are not targeted nor read as necessarily containing material for general audiences. They typically interest delineated groups of people who wish to participate and remain connected socially in some way to the video maker” (2009: 73).

Taking personal photographs and recording videos at special events acts like a memory aid which helps people to remember how they were at the time of the shoot, but videos of affinity have a totally different perspective and the affinity does not occur out of nowhere. The video maker has to present a current focal point and communicative language as if he/she is having a face-to-face conversation with viewers to be able attract their attention (Lindgren, 2017). Though compared to live video streams, they technically seem like the past events, actually most videos of affinity try to convey a particular incident that the creator has experienced very recently no matter how shocking or unimportant. By sharing informal experiences, a video of affinity builds a bridge of interaction and keeps the conversation gates open whether the video contains a conventional content or professional creativity (Chalfen, 2010). Figuratively, the videos try to say: This is what I do every day! Subscribe to my channel! I want to have a conversation! You can comment on my video!

The modern-day affinity videos destroy the traditional male (mostly father) oriented home-mode media production though they have not been taken seriously as a real communication medium by some researchers and general public until very recently. When camera companies tried to convince amateur video makers to pay attention to the standardized style and media type, the difference between amateur and professional video makers did not get better, on the contrary, it got worse. According to Zimmerman:

The emphasis on Hollywood-continuity style dominated and restricted amateur-film aesthetic discourse; it naturalized its own codes and reined in the flexibility and spontaneity inherent in lightweight equipment. (1995: 126)

She points out that the homemade movies made by males usually emphasized the reproduction of the specific patriarchal and domestic patterns of the middle-class, nuclear and patriarchal families (1995). However, with the advanced and affordable technology, the online vlog community, which consists mainly of young people, now has the ability to break the patriarchal barriers that Hollywood has been setting for many years. Today, every user can create videos with more liberated ideologies or values and since it allows people to produce and distribute any personal narratives. YouTube has become the democratic archive of the affinity videos by not using the filter system of the traditional media. The videos that convey the message through rich verbal and visual elements, enable vloggers to express themselves in any way they want and this makes the sense of affinity easier to occur between the vlogger and the viewer. (Rawson, 2013)

As mentioned before, the feeling of affinity typically occurs when people share the same physical or virtual space. The common point of these two options is showing the body whether you create a virtual game character or you attend the same course.

In vlogs, the body appears usually at the center of the screen and vlogger stays very close to the camera, easing viewers to observe the expressions and characteristics of the vloggers face. Nardi uses the term ‘habeas corpus’² to point out how showing the body, the one’s self in videos helps to create the sense of affinity. She mentions that when people get together, the way that they look each other and see their full body image initiates and improves the connection as explains:

Bonding and the expression of commitment seem to happen most easily when people see each other in person, with the body in full view. In social presence theory the body is also important, though it is a sense of the specificity of a particular body that is at stake. With showing up, any body (not anybody) will do; it is simply the living flesh that is called for. (2005: 114)

Thus, many videos of affinity contain routine, daily habits that people do when they get together with friends and family members, such as eating a food and drinking a coffee that makes viewers feel like they are having a casual conversation with the video maker. Habeas corpus acts like a sincerity element as vloggers exists in front of the camera with their whole body when vloggers mention that they are happy, stressful or dyed their hair, their ‘recorded selves’ at that moment on the screen provides the proof to the viewers through their voice tone, mimics, body language and appearance (Lindgren, 2017).

Commenting is also another important feature to see the sign of affinity between the vlogger and the viewers, it especially gives viewers a chance to present their personality that resembles with some social communities online. It can be said that the commentary section of the videos influences the vloggers as much as other of vlogs on YouTube (Strangelove, 2010). For example, iJustine is one of the most

² A Latin term meaning ‘that you have the body’ in English, as defined by Oxford Dictionary.

recognized vloggers on YouTube with her technologic device reviews and cooking tutorials. In one of her vlogs, a user posted the comment, “Oh this looks so fun!!! I wanna make fortune cookies!!” or “Why the hell do they have soo much box cake mix??” (iJustine, 2017) While positive comments create the sense of affinity, vloggers also try to answer the questions. Since it is not possible for the video maker to reply to the questions the viewers ask in the same video, there are other ways for the vlogger to respond according to Lange:

Video makers may react to comments by: 1) reading them; 2) posting comments in response to the comments they received on a video; 3) posting a comment or question on the commenter’s video or channel page; 4) extending a friend request to the commenter; or 5) viewing or subscribing to the commenter’s videos. (2007: 369)

In addition to what Lange states, vloggers might also respond them in their next video by mentioning the commenter’s nickname or real name while answering the question. Though it is not certain for vloggers to respond to each and every one of the comments, especially those with millions of followers and thousands of commenters, the users see the act of commenting as the first step to expand their online social connections.

Though it is easy to observe the signs of affinity through comments, it is not possible to expect each comment to show the same affiliation towards the vlogger. Unless the comment section is hidden by the video maker, anyone is free to comment whether audience like the content or not. For example, again in one of iJustine’s videos, a viewer made comment, “Rename your channel to iDiot”, referring her YouTube username by implying that the content she creates is nonsense. (iJustine, 2016)

The videos seen as a means of linking to an ongoing social relationship, not as a cinematic final; it helps to build a social network regardless of the number of the people in the community. The main point of these videos is to create a network by establishing open channels between the video maker and audience, and because the Internet users are getting more and more visual, by keeping the video maker at the center of the video. Consequently, the affinity actually connects the audience to the person who has the same interests, not to the content itself.

2.3 The Evolution of the Mainstream Media with Vloggers on YouTube

It not only changed the way people spend time is on the internet, it also changed the ways users obtain information. Users do not have to dream about what they read on blogs or Wikipedia. Now they can witness them, like a traveler on a cruise, without taking a step. Visual discourse has gained a great amount of value when the first TV came out, but TV schedules are pre-determined, and the number of shows is very limited compared to YouTube's millions of videos uploaded daily. Now with endless options, people can choose whatever they want to watch. Moreover, traditional TV is losing viewers. Obviously, this does not mean that people just suddenly stopped watching TV for no reason. This suggests that there has been a shift from TV to other recent media forms, including YouTube.

TV was probably one of the most influential and most life-changing innovations in the twentieth century media, when the internet is excluded. When it was invented in the early 1930's, it completely changed society, and nothing has been the same since. Television became widespread in the US in 1950's and TV shows like *Peter Pan*, *The Tonight Show*, *Disneyland* and *The Mickey Mouse Club* started to air on

channels like CBS, NBC and ABC. Then in 1988, it became possible to watch TV broadcasts on the World Wide Web with computers. (Stephens, 2000)

Communication methods changed with the introduction of Web 2.0 in early 2000's, and especially after numerous new huge social media platforms emerged such as Facebook and Twitter. However, YouTube is the only platform where users communicate primarily through the videos they upload, unlike Facebook's personal timelines and friending features. In Facebook, to become a friend with someone, a user needs other user's approval and with an approval it turns into a two-way communication. On YouTube, a user can subscribe to a channel without an approval, so it can be a one-way communication. As William Uricchio mentions:

The digital turn has accelerated the challenges to the ontological distinctions among established media, offering both new definitional conceits and new media forms with wide-ranging implications for traditional media. It has informed our understanding of media history, shaping our historical agenda and the questions we put to the past. (2009: 25)

In TV broadcast media, accessing to channels and programs is fully controlled by the institutionalized politics of the broadcasting corporations. On the contrary, YouTube is an open and not predetermined platform where users do not face many obstacles that prevents them to join to the biggest cyber video community and this is one of the many reasons why YouTube is more seductive than traditional TV. Furthermore, users do not feel restricted on YouTube thanks to its features like previewing and creating a list, while automatically generated videos are suggested to viewers for related content. Offering high level of interactivity is another advantage of YouTube with the comment section, replay and like or dislike buttons (Calkins, 2014). Moreover, if the channel uploads the original language or translated text, YouTube

also offers a subtitle option for viewers watching a video in a language other than their own.

Online videos accounted for 73% of the internet traffic in 2016 and it is estimated to increase to 83% by 2021, and, YouTube is the biggest player in terms of both content creation and views, with more than 1.5 billion users, YouTube is the biggest online video content creator (Tran, 2017). In only one day, viewers watch over one billion hours video on YouTube; 400 hours of video content is being uploaded every minute; and more than 50% of viewers watch YouTube videos on their smartphones (Smith, 2017). To compare its power, Nielsen data shows that Americans spend approximately 1.25 billion hours in front of TV each day, a figure that is declining every day. “YouTube isn’t only catching up with TV, it’s also far surpassed Facebook video and Netflix in terms of the amount of time spent on each of those sites per day (100 million and 116 million hours respectively)” says Sirena Bergman. (2017)

First the availability of low-cost and compact video equipment has allowed a wider range of expertise levels to freely record casual moments you can enjoy sharing with friends and family (Moran, 2002) and then with the advent of the Internet and YouTube, the options for viewing captured videos have shifted out of small-scale audiences of friends and family to global sharing habits.

Basically, the blogs and vlogs are contemporary versions of the centuries-old ‘hand-written’ practice – written diaries – which has always been accepted as highly therapeutic and absolutely private (Sample, 2009). However, its evolved form, is the exact opposite of what people have been practicing with diaries. Blogs and vlogs are on the Internet, the public home of new media. The spread of less expensive videos

has facilitated the ability to capture more personal ephemeris, such as spontaneous and small experiences that may not be part of broader or significant life celebrations and YouTube made it possible to share them with the world, as long as the user wants to share (McNeill, 2005: 1).

Although single purpose digital cameras were also actively used and still being used, they did not change the structure of the mainstream media as much as smartphones did. With their multifaceted applications; compact size; and high resolution, built-in cameras, smartphones are perfect for anyone who want to record a moment whether with a photo or a video (Lindgren, 2017). Sociologist Kiku Adatto mentions that now people ‘live in the age of photo op’. Watching, shooting or sharing content may not be completely new but the advanced technologies helped people to intensify the pattern (2008). Most vlogs used to be recorded with webcams, but now with cheap cameras or smart phones anyone can be a vlogger anytime. For example, now there are even webpages that teach users how to vlog better with the smartphones where they give tutorials on the use of light, microphone and tripods; for example, Amani Channel, who gives five tips on how to vlog better with a smartphone on his blog page (2017).

While television is losing viewers day by day, YouTube continues to expand throughout the world onto almost every screen possible. Since today’s society is visual and fast-consumer, users are psychologically feel more pleased when they get the information through short, intensified and ‘bite-sized’ videos (Calkins, 2014). Only a couple of years ago, which technically is not a long time, blogs were considered as one of the most groundbreaking mediums of the third millennium before the vlogs took over and completely changed the users’ involvement on cyber

space. Now, reading through two or three pages is too difficult to finish in ten or fifteen minutes since modes of access change swiftly, it is easier for someone to view a video on a smartphone than read a full article or blog posts etc. As Calkins notes, getting the right information has never been less effortless in physical, economic and psychologic way. It is safe to say that online YouTube is actually not recurrence of the TV, rather they are the intensified versions blended with modern technology (2014).

The way people express themselves and their ideas is also evolving as the technological options are changing. Before YouTube videos and expressional vlogs became this popular, both the commercial and entertainment industry professionals were the ones the construct the identities, information and experiences. The efficiency of this system is measured by the money the big corporations make, not by the number of the ideas or stories produced. As John Hartley states:

Thus, over the past century, cinema, radio, and television have all organized and scaled human storytelling into an industrial system, where millions watch but mere hundreds do the writing. Broadcast media speak to and on behalf of us all in mass anonymous cultures. (2009: 132)

Fiske and coined the term a 'bardic function' which presents the idea that TV's are there to tell stories like bards would to audience before mass media (Fiske & Hartley, 2003). However, now every social media user can be a bard, but YouTube is the first platform to mention when the issue is telling stories, especially with its famous slogan 'broadcast yourself'. YouTube allows everyone to have their own bardic moments. Instead of TV's restricted and controlled one-way communication, now each vlogger or video maker can contribute to enlarge the universal pool of knowledge. It is now 'the means by which 'bottom-up' (DIY consumer-based) and

‘top-down’ (industrial expert-based) knowledge-generation connects and interacts” (Potts et al, 2008). Though there was a widespread backlash over it through mostly from traditional media, this shift in the bardic function was even recognized by Time magazine when they named ‘You’ as the person of the year in 2006 thanks to the rising importance of the self-representation and hugely expanding online communities. Even with small contributions, millions of people have started to come together online and made their voices heard as an online revolution (Grossman, 2006). You can share, you can choose, you can create, and you can join. It is all you. Now most users access the content produced by a growing number of other ‘amateur’ users, instead of the content produced by a few professionals (Manovitch, 2008).

On the other hand, now over-polished commercials on TV do not seem sincere. If users want to buy a cosmetic product, they just open YouTube and look for any recommendations in vlogs. People think that word-of-mouth from friends and family members is the most trustworthy advice (Crotts, 1999), and users also see vloggers as a very reliable source. As an example, now people are getting the information about a place from vlogs, rather than TV programs because the information and advice provided by the vlogs gives us more content and reliability than the traditional presentation. If people want to visit a country or place, they learn the details of the trip, what to do and what not to do, through a vlogger’s camera who is seen as ‘another tourist like me’ (Arat, 2015).

Since the first video ‘Me at the Zoo’ was uploaded to YouTube in 2015, the number that video makers upload vlogs on YouTube is increasing tremendously and now some of the vloggers are even recognized by the Guinness World Records. Charles Trippy, who has been vlogging for over eleven years, has uploaded a total of 3057

personal vlogs on YouTube on his channel Internet Killed TV as of 14 September 2017 and broke the record in the daily personal video blogs posted on YouTube (Guinness, 2017). Pewdiepie, whose real name is Felix Arvid, was also recognized by Guinness as the most subscribed person with his 58 million subscribers (Guinness, 2016). The number of his subscribers doubles even the biggest stars like Taylor Swift and Rihanna, who have 26.7 and 26.2 million subscribers respectively. Arvid was also listed as one of Time Magazine's 100 most influential people in 2016 (Snake, 2016).

It is not easy to determine whether YouTube is completely free of the force of traditional broadcasting culture or still under the control of mainstream media. However, the point is, with the effect of Web 2.0 technology, statistics also show that YouTube creators and consumers are more willing to support each other than other social network sites, though some may not even recognize YouTube as a SNS. Moreover, in today's online world, the videos on YouTube are the perfect cyber spaces to witness dynamic communication between the content creator and the viewer and how their roles are blended in the cultural, technologic and traditional sense. With that, in the next chapter I will be analyzing how coming out videos on YouTube help LGBTQ people to develop an identity.

CHAPTER 3

THE RISE OF ONLINE LGBTQ PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

3.1 The Stages of LGBTQ Identity Development

People are not born with an awareness of their sexual identity, so it is impossible for humans to identify themselves as heterosexual or homosexual right after they are born. Rather, it is a slow process that spans a long period of time during which individuals learn how to perform gender, in accordance with their sex. However, in a cultural sense, performing sexual identity is not a representation, but rather a construction based on socially determined categories. Though, for many years it has been claimed that only the gender is socially constructed while sex is biological and fixed, Butler, objects to this theory by claiming both gender and sex are socially constructed, and people perform what heterosexist societies impose on them to interpellate (1990).

This interpellation is repeated constantly throughout one's life by various authorities in order to naturalize sex according to social definitions. Defining gender as the social representation of the sexed body has allowed society to classify sexual orientations as normal, natural, or perverted while building a hierarchy between the male and female biological sexes (Butler, 2015).

Moreover, the idea of socially accepted, 'proper' gender should not only be an identification of one's self through his/her reproduction organs, it should also direct an individual to have a sexual attraction towards the opposite sex. Basically, it can be said that the social institutions construct the sexes only as heterosexual men and women. Butler also argues that identities, whether sexed or not, do not have any innate authenticity, which is a simulacrum. They are not the reason why people act or perform in a certain way, instead identities are the results of social performances. As she mentions in *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution*:

Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed. It seems fair to say that certain kinds of acts are usually interpreted as expressive of a gender core or identity, and that these acts either conform to an expected gender identity or contest that expectation in some way. (1988: 527)

As Butler stresses, since in heterosexist societies, homosexuality is not accepted as a 'normal' part of one's identity, there are usually very few, if any, constructive institutions where LGBTQ can acculturate themselves. For this reason, queer identity development differs from a heterosexual development.

Homosexual individuals enter the process of sexual orientation identity development, with an increasing realization that their sexual orientation is towards not to the opposite but to the same sex. Though there are more than one model for the homosexual identity development; phases of fear, anxiety, guilt, and embarrassment have been described as the common point in all of them (Cass, 1979). These emotions occur when a homosexual starts to grow an interest towards the individuals in his/her gender, when they are disturbed by the homophobic reaction they get from the society, and when they start to feel a contrast between the heterosexual identity

that they have developed up until then and the occurrence of new, different homosexual stimulations.

When considered as a natural part of the identity development process, many scholars have addressed the fact that homosexual identity development is not very different from the heterosexual one. However, later sociologists have pointed out that although this process is not biologically different, because of the effect of social exclusion, homosexual identity development goes through different psychological stages (Yıldırım, 2016).

These steps do not always go in order; variabilities, pauses and delays are always possible, besides some people might not go through some or any of these steps at all. (Yüksel, 2010). According to the identity development model proposed by sociologist Richard Troiden, a queer person usually goes through four stages of internal identity development progress to get to the final version of his/her identity and these are: sensitization, identity confusion, identity assumption and commitment stages.

The first one is the sensitization stage. This stage usually occurs prior to puberty and the person starts to question him/herself because they develop the perception of being 'different' than other heterosexual peers. Since this stage happens during childhood, they are seen just as a kid with a different personality, instead of being seen specifically as a homosexual. Though many homosexual people claim that they were aware of 'being different' than most of the kids, Bell, Weinberg and Hammersmith point that actually most of the children start to realize their differences after the age of 12 (1981).

The second one is the identity confusion stage. By middle to late adolescence, queer people start to see themselves as an outsider sexual subject. The incompatibility between heterosexual identity and the possibility of being homosexual causes anxiety. During this process, the individual questions his/her identity as they think that they are 'probably' homosexual since the same-sex arousal starts to grow and behaviors which considered as homosexual are developed (Troiden, 1988). As Cass also mentions:

You are not sure who you are. You are confused about what sort of person you are and where your life is going. You ask yourself the question "Who am I?", "Am I a homosexual?", "Am I a really heterosexual?". (1984: 156)

The third stage is the identity assumption, when individuals begin to accept themselves as queer. They begin to recognize their identity as one of the normal and valid components of their personality. During this stage, they start to share the truth about their sexual orientations with other queer people, in other words they start to come out. As they acknowledge themselves as a homosexual, they might have sexual experimentations with other non-heterosexuals while exploring the queer subculture. However, the acknowledgment of being homosexual usually occurs after some contacts are being made with other homosexual people. Only a few people became aware of their identity before contacting other LGBTQ individuals. In addition, they start to react more against homophobia. (Troiden, 1988).

The fourth and final one is the commitment stage. In this stage, the person fully adopts the homosexual way of life and homosexuality begins to be exalted. As the anger becoming more evident within the feeling of otherness, heterosexual reactions are being underestimated in this period. Since the confusion about being homosexual or heterosexual is ended, they can commit to same-sex emotional relationships and

disclose their identities to heterosexual people. In this final stage, they become happy and proud of who they are, and they stand up for themselves if people do not accept their sexual orientations (Troiden, 1988). Again, as Cass describes:

You are prepared to tell almost anyone that you are a homosexual. You are happy about the way you are but feel that being a homosexual is not the most important part of you. You mix socially with homosexuals and heterosexuals with whom you are open about your homosexuality. (1984: 156)

However, some LGBTQ people, especially those live in underdeveloped regions in the world, cannot even reach to the step three, let alone step four. The reason behind this is that those people completely suppress their sexualities or identities to be able to follow the old traditions and customs of the society. Simply put, they are being oppressed by the political or religious order that makes them hide their queer personality.

3.2 The Visibility Issue of the LGBTQ Community

As more LGBTQ people are seen in the mainstream or social media, they become more visible instead of being avoided or ignored. When people see someone represented, they can more easily understand who those people are and embrace them. This visibility not only helps encourage heterosexual people to embrace LGBTQ people by creating awareness, it also helps closeted LGBTQ people to construct an identity within that community.

On the other hand, this can create a sense of affinity for their identity when LGBTQ people see representations of other queer people in the media and this can improve the self-esteem of the people who feels ashamed for being who he/she is. Nowadays the most common sources of information that serves the best for queer people are the social media and social networking sites (SNS) and not the traditional mainstream

media. Thus, it is highly important to analyze the contributions made by YouTube and the coming out vlogs to the LGBTQ individuals' visibility and acculturation progress.

LGBTQ people have to follow a specific path to be able to disclose and reveal their sexuality, when compared to straight individuals, who are not expected to disclose their sexual identity. Most LGBTQ people gain self-recognition through observing, questioning and personal practices (Cass, 1979) and the coming out or coming out of the closet as the long form, is one of the most important stages of this process.

Coming out is a metaphor for LGBTQ people's revelation of one's sexual or gender identity. The act of coming out is not a one-time event for LGBTQ people; rather, it is a lifelong process, since other people usually assume LGBTQ people as straight until the person comes out (BelongTo, 2018). Though coming out feels like it liberates LGBTQ people, the philosopher and theorist Judith Butler debates that the process actually puts those people into a situation where they can be judged by the heterosexist society (2009).

More than twenty years ago, Ellen DeGeneres came out as a lesbian on the cover of Time magazine by stating 'Yep, I'm Gay', right after her fictional character Ellen Morgan came out in *The Puppy Episode* in her sitcom *Ellen* becoming the first-ever gay lead character on American television. She risked her career not to hide behind a fake identity and the reactions of the public and the mainstream media were too harsh, she eventually lost her professional reputation at that time (Dow, 2001) until she regained it with her tremendously successful talk show series called *The Ellen Show*. However, even with all that turmoil, the coming out scene has easily become the most important coming out incident in the broadcasting history, not because of

the 42 million people who tuned in to watch the episode –though it was one of the largest audience at the time– but because it made a history by becoming the premise of the upcoming LGBTQ visibility in a much broader sense (Nicholson, 2017).

Though Ellen DeGeneres had to overcome a tremendous amount of hatred, discrimination and even death threats, she continually marched forward and her contributions to LGBTQ visibility paid off when Barack Obama presented her the Presidential Medal of Freedom in November, 2016. During his speech, Obama stated:

Just how much courage was required for Ellen to come out on the most public of stages almost 20 years ago. Just how important it was not just to the LGBTQ community, but for all of us to see... What an incredible burden that was to bear. To risk your career like that. People don't do that very often. And then to have the hopes of millions on your shoulders. (ObamaWhiteHouse)

Her coming out scene even created a concrete proof of the effect of its visibility. For example, there is a website that especially focuses on the representations of lesbian and bisexual women in the media which is called afterellen.com, named after the famous coming out scene in *Ellen* (Voo & Anderson-Minshall 2015). After the influence of DeGeneres, many LGBTQ characters have started to appear on some other TV shows like *Will & Grace*, *Queer as Folk* and *Glee*. According to Raymond, however, not every TV series has the same authenticity about representing the LGBTQ community. He thinks that *Will & Grace* depicts the gay character as an isolated and stereotypical gay best friend like the characters in the reality TV show called *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. In these type of show, they are always depicted as flamboyant and feminine individuals who have a great taste in fashion, without an exception. On the other hand, *Queer as Folk* completely revolves around

the facts lesbian, bisexual and trans persons go through in their lives (2008). On the other hand, *Glee*, with its high number of queer characters, usually not only focuses on the problems people are having while coming out whether to a family member or to friend, but also takes the subject of bullying very seriously (Sarkissian, 2014).

There are also some popular competition or reality shows which helps LGBTQ visibility and the most popular one is called *RuPaul's Drag Race*. The show is hosted by the most famous drag queen in the United States, RuPaul Andre Charles and the show's aim is to find America's next drag superstar. In the show, a group of drag queens – men dressed as women – are competing against each other with their fancy dresses and musical performances through lip-syncing. The show, as a queer platform, influentially supports the LGBTQ visibility by attracting attention into mainstream media, and thanks to its longevity with nine seasons, drag culture has turned into one of the most active parts of the LGBTQ community (Brennan & Gudelunas, 2017). However, the show is also being criticized for forcing its contestants to follow society's beauty standards and the everlasting dramas takes place on the show which strengthens the stereotypes of gay men being gossips, sassy drama queens as it is replicating oppressive female gender issues or that drag culture is the only way to be gay (Magness, 2016).

So, it can be said that the visibility level varies from series to series or shows to shows but today, according to the report released by GLAAD (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) organization, the visibility level of the LGBTQ characters is at an all-time high on the US television channels with total of 58 characters, equivalent of the 6.4% of the all the characters on television (2017). But still, Suzanna Walters is not convinced that the public gets to know LGBTQ community better as they see more queer representations as TV characters (2001).

On the other hand, the LGBTQ representation on films seems worse than the TV. According to a study by researchers at the University of Southern California, out of 4,544 characters appeared on the top 100 films of 2016, only a total of 51 characters were gay, lesbian or bisexual. Out of these 51 characters, 36 were gay, 9 were lesbian and 6 were bisexual while none of the LGBTQ characters appeared were transgender. Among 100 movies, only one movie had an LGBTQ protagonist named Chiron, an African American character that appeared in *Moonlight*, which won Best Picture award at the 2017 Oscars (Smith, 2017).

Therefore, today, LGBTQ individuals can take these steps by researching and exploring the online informal sources. While surfing through online sources, a person can be both visible or invisible, manages the level of communication and discovers the methods s/he can use to express his/her feelings while making peace with their offline personalities. The internet is the perfect place for LGBTQ people to read, listen and watch other people's stories and ask questions about who they are. The Internet also makes practicing the behaviors of their developing identities possible (Fox & Ralston, 2016).

As the internet started to grow enormously in the late 90s, a new field emerged to research the usage of the computer-mediated communication of LGBTQ people like Internet Relay Chat and online chat rooms (Tikkanen & Ross, 2000). People who were feeling like outcasts started to use internet's advantages by remaining anonymous and communicating with the people from different places (McKenna & Bargh, 1998). In addition to these, recently podcasts, blogs, vlogs and online forums have increased their importance thanks to advantages of containing more visual content. These opportunities gave LGBTQ individuals a chance to relate to similar

others while achieving the things they might not have been able to do offline, such as self-disclosure (Campbell, 2004).

According to Lindsey Jacobson, a recent study on the young people revealed that 20% of millennials identify themselves as LGBTQ while 42% of the same group says that they live in a homophobic environment (2017). Most LGBTQ individuals, who especially are born to straight parents, may not have any inherent or educational support or a role model around them when they start to realize that they are not straight. In addition to that, oppressive patriarchal communities, that see, homosexuality or any kind of queerness as a perversion, have the ability to prevent queer youth from expressing themselves through both physical and psychological restraints. Now, many LGBTQ people open YouTube to cope with these types of difficulties and ease the burden of developing a sexual identity through two crucial processes: visibility and acculturation. An academic of media studies, Bryan Wuest states that the visibility functions in two ways: one, the viewers get to see various LGBTQ representations and two, vloggers intentionally make themselves visible. He also mentions that acculturation means learning the LGBTQ culture to be able to communicate with the queer people and manage to live in the dominant heterosexual society (2014).

As Walters remarks, “we [as queers] are largely born to and raised by those different from us, are not birthed into a ready-made identity, and must actively seek out and construct a community and identity whose existence is predicated on that seeking... (2011: 28-29)” This process is not enculturation, rather acculturation because enculturation is the process of learning the characteristic of the ambient culture (Grusec & Hastings, 2016) however most LGBTQ people, who were not raised in a

queer environment, have to go through the acculturation process, which is learning the forms of a culture other than one's own, to form an identity that they can embrace. As Joseph Goodwin points out:

Because of its covert nature, the gay community lacks the formal institutions that usually assist in enculturation. The family, churches, schools, and social organizations all take part in teaching people how to operate in the straight culture... Without comparable sources of instruction and support, gay people must rely primarily upon each other to learn how to function effectively within the gay world. (1989: 16)

Many people stated that they subscribe to the LGBTQ vloggers' channels to find out more about "the issues specific to their identities" (Wuest, 2014: 639). While some mentioned that they specifically watch coming out videos. In these coming out videos either a vlogger comes out to the viewers in front of the camera or to family or friends by hiding the camera to be able to document the reactions of those people when the person tells them that they are queer (Fox & Ralston, 2016).

The videos I watched before I came out myself helped me realize there were people who were like me out there. In my town, there were no support groups or gay hang out places, and I had no gay friends, so I felt alone, and YouTube opened a world to me.

This commentary made by the interviewee D.B. (2011) remarks upon the importance of the coming out videos and the reason why they have become an important tool of visibility and representation of the LGBTQ community. He admits that later, he also shot a coming out video of his and the aim behind is to kind of 'giving back' to the community he took advantage of when he needed.

As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, thanks to the increasing development of the technology recording a video is easier than ever since now almost every computer and smartphone has a built-in camera, and the great number of videos uploaded on YouTube made it easier to find which type of online video we want to

watch. Young people have spent so much time watching the online videos that now they are capable of producing a content of their own. Moreover, since YouTube does not separate the users based on their location, eliminating the geographical boundaries also enables people to see more representations from all around the world (Burgess & Green, 2009).

Before watching a video on YouTube, the first thing a viewer does is look at the title because it makes the content and purpose of the video clearer and the description basically gives a summary of the video before opening it, so this helps the viewers to find the video they are looking for (Wuest, 24). While uploading coming out videos, vloggers usually use eye-catching common titles to make their videos more 'visible' to queer people such as: 'coming out', 'my coming out story', 'coming out as bisexual' or simply 'yes, I'm gay' (Figure 1). These titles are examples of only a small portion of coming out videos. Furthermore, some video makers even add specific information to the title like location or religious connection, what makes their coming out story a different experience from the others. These videos show a variety of uncultured norms such as: "Coming out gay: but raised Mormon", "Coming out to my Christian mom", "Being gay in India", "Coming out in the South". When viewers search for a specific video about being gay in the deep American South, these types of detailed videos can be more useful than a coming out video from New York for those who live in oppressive regions. As Weeks explains, "we search for them, claim them, assert and affirm them... They provide a bedrock for our most fundamental being and most prized social belongings" (2007: 43).



Figure 1. A screenshot of the cover of the Connor Franta's coming out video which was viewed over 11 million times.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WYodBfRxKWI>)

After listening everything carefully that vloggers say about their coming out experience and even inspecting the facial gestures they are making, viewers themselves become eager to have the same confidence and cultural level as the vloggers have. According to Goodwin, they have to go through the five-step acculturation process and these are: “1. Gay self-identification, 2. Decision to associate with ‘other gays’ (however vaguely defined that term). 3. Association with gay subculture. 4. Development of subcultural competency. 5. Assumption of the role of teacher of guide for subcultural neophytes” (1989: 3).

In the sense of YouTube's coming out vlog genre, playing the role of teacher can be analyzed under two subgenres. The first subgenre is a type of vlogger that records a coming out video to both learn more about queer culture and share personal experiences. Their aim usually is to help others, while others also supporting them in a mutual relationship (Wuest, 2014).

The second subgenre, on the contrary to the first level, is a type of vlogger who turns himself/herself into a LGBTQ YouTube celebrity by supporting LGBTQ through constructive videos. Such as the user named GayGod, whose real name is Matthew Lush. His coming out video was viewed more than 1.3 million times since it was uploaded 10 years ago. He is an openly gay, online and offline, man and he seems like someone who had already established a strong queer identity. In the very acculturating video, he does not want any support or recommendation; rather he gives instructions to the viewers on how or when to come out by mentioning the mistakes he has made before that he does not want his viewers to do the same. Lush ends the video with saying “I hope you enjoyed this story, and I hope it helps in any way” (YouTube, 2007).

Many trans vloggers make video ‘updates’, where they list their current physical changes and current state of mind. They track and archive transition as a bodily and psychosocial process or they ‘check in’ to signal that they are still there, sometimes without having anything in particular to say. (Raun, 2014: 4)

Visibility and acculturation processes for trans people might be more important than they are for gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals. The reason behind is that these processes are only psychological for the LGBTQ people, while for trans individuals, both psychological and physical at the same time. The displaying of the reverse-chronologic transitioning process adds the diary-like function to transgender vlogs. Besides, since they usually depicted as a prostitute in the mainstream media, lots of transgender people are afraid of the end up the same because of those distorted and unrealistic fictional characters. A trans man confessed to Fox & Ralston that he found his true identity through watching transgender vlogs on YouTube and expresses his feelings like:

Somebody showed me this collaboration of trans men on YouTube and they were all on testosterone and I was like, 'Oh my god, I can live a normal life. My reference was, like, Jerry Springer. I was afraid that I was going to have to be a sex worker, or just be this oddity and go into porn, or do all sorts of this yuck. And there were all these normal guys [on YouTube] who you couldn't even tell were trans. (2016: 639)

As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, as lots of people's content consumption habit shifted from mainstream media to YouTube; vlogs also have become the medium where LGBTQ representation takes place the most with more specific examples. Even though the representations of the LGBTQ characters on TV are all time high, Gray claims that visibility and acculturation process online is more effective than TV due to the fact that TV series usually put their main focus on LGBTQ people who live in urban areas. However, with YouTube now queer individuals are capable of discovering other people's stories or experiences which reflects their own special condition more precisely than the scripted characters of *Will & Grace* or *Glee* (2009).

Moreover, on YouTube vloggers are completely free from the mainstream media restrictions, and as long as they do not say or share explicit content they can make any statement and take any action. This freedom is not possible on TV because of the comfort of 'prevalent culture' and money-oriented studios and companies (Shugart, 2003). Viewers can also communicate with either the video maker or other commenters/viewers that this is something improves the LGBTQ individuals' identity construction, instead of television's one-way communication. With these new opportunities, now queer people can remove the constraints that existed for a really long time. As Robyn Harper mentions:

Visibility is important. Being out and being visible represents an opportunity to educate people on the reality and normality of LGBTQ lives and the normality of being in a relationship with a person of the same gender. Change

comes about through this education. The effect of visibility illustrates the futility of any opposition, fear, prejudice, or intolerance. (2012)

Probably one of the biggest LGBTQ movements in the US history is the foundation of the National Coming Out day, which later spread to many parts of the world. The aim of the coming out day is to show the power of coming out as the most basic tool for the LGBTQ activism. The day it is celebrated is 11th October, which is also the anniversary of the 1987 National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights (HRC, 2018a). A lot of vloggers post videos on that day to both remind their audience the importance of the day and to encourage people to come out, especially on a day like this. Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the biggest LGBTQ civil rights advocacy organization, celebrates the coming out day by posting videos of the inspirational people who talks about the importance of coming out (HRC, 2018b). The number of the coming out videos on YouTube is increasing day by day, but every October 11, users upload the highest number in that year (Figure 2) and this attention clearly shows the positive impacts of the ‘coming out day’ activism for LGBTQ visibility.

Number of Coming Out Videos Uploaded, by Month

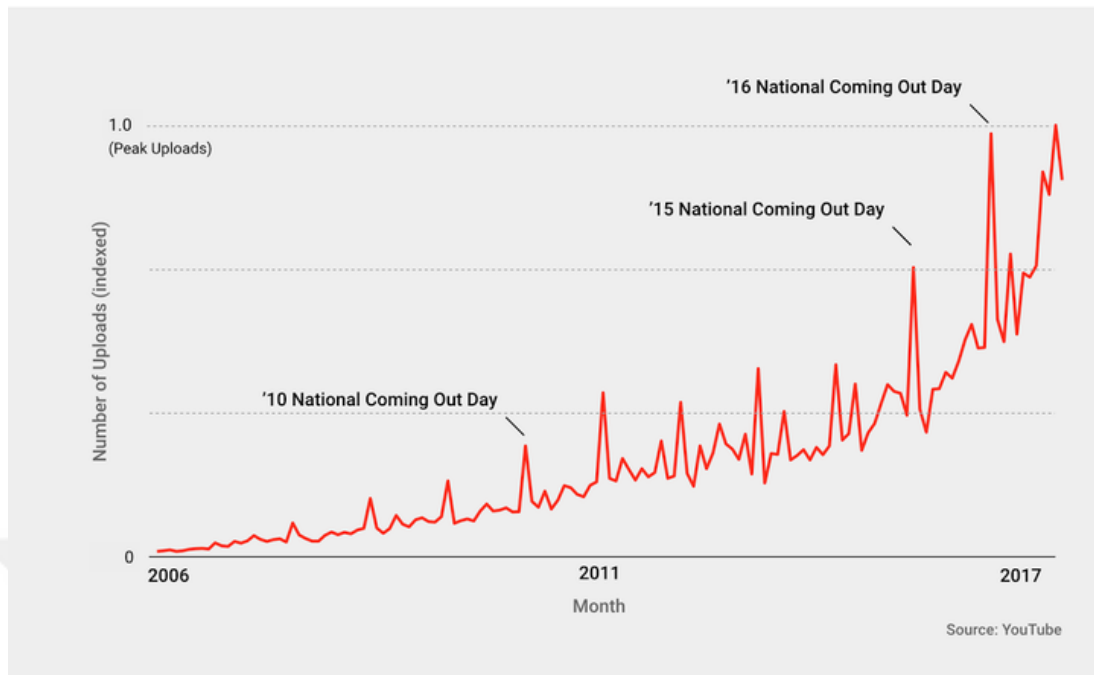


Figure 2. A graphic of the number of coming out videos uploaded by month. (https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/10-youtube-coming-out-videos_us_59dd1c60e4b04fc4e1e94082)

By using YouTube's power, they have started to take their power back from the mainstream media monopoly and shared equally among them to be able to reflect their own selves and have the right to choose how much they want to be visible or invisible. Vlogs have become the perfect places for the LGBTQ youth to construct and exercise their own identity, especially for those who is not accepted by either their family or the society.

3.3 Shared Discourse in Coming Out Videos

The authentic coming out videos have turned into one of the most prominent vlog forms on YouTube. Each with their unique and distinctive way, LGBTQ people use YouTube as a confessional platform to share their coming out experiences by both drawing the lines of their personal space and getting involved in as a part of the active process of queer community identity development. This strong rhetorical

action takes place mostly when queer individuals feel a powerful desire to express the reality about their sexual orientation or identity to others. Thus, coming out videos display the structuring process of sexual identity and sexual orientation by means of public discourse. Instead of the patriarchal values of the mainstream media which usually stereotypes the characteristics of being a woman and man, coming out videos are attempting to break the traditional understandings of identity, gender and sexuality.

For Alexandra Juhasz, providing users an alternative chance to represent themselves transforms YouTube into a ‘niche-tube’ (Jenkins, 2008) because with the videos users create, they can destroy the conformity and heteronormativity structured by the paternalistic society (Juhasz, 2008). As also explained by Becker:

Coming out is an assertion that, through rhetorical representation, entails its opposite: going in. The experience can make sense only under conditions of hiding, and thinking in terms of coming out collapses a wide array of states—confusion, doubt, fear, silence, ignorance, or simple indifference—into one: the closet. (2009: 5)

For LGBTQ individuals who do not live in urban areas, the development of identity usually occurs through the places outside of their community (Meem, Gibson & Alexander, 2009). Coming out videos offer the opportunity for lots of LGBTQ people who have to hide their sexual identity in daily life either to disclose their sexual orientation without the social pressure, or to learn how to develop a queer identity through the discourse which includes the experiences of the LGBTQ people. Alexander and Losh stresses that in many coming out videos “the performative quality of the speech act also reminds the viewer that an actual change of state takes place through the speaker’s rhetoric. This revelation not only marks a life-changing rhetorical occasion but may actually constitute it” (2010: 39).

In his coming out video, though the user apples33ds seems very self-contained and comfortable with talking about his sexual orientation, his speech might create encouragement narratives for other people watching the video who have not come out yet. For example, at the beginning of his speech he uses his rhetoric to introduce himself to other users before mentioning the viewers he is friend with in his daily life who might be surprised with his statements:

Hello, this is John. I'm doing this video because last week these videos really helped me in my circumstances. I'm gay, and I came out on the weekend. I had come out once before and that was to a friend on St. Patrick's Day this year. For anybody that's watching that knows me that I haven't told I guess this will be a shock to you. I don't know. Just let me know if you see this, so we can talk about it. (2008)

In *Queer Online: Media, Technology, and Sexuality*, Kate O'Riordan and David J. Phillips state that many studies and researches reveal that mentioning "place, space, embodiment, and everyday life" on coming out videos is really importance to construct and create the queer (2007: 4). Ken Plummer also comments that in narratives queer people use to express their true selves, they use an easygoing rhetoric with a sense of straightforward communication as if the listeners are "discovering a truth" (1994: 83). The coming out process usually contains a narrative with specific and recreated rhetoric: "young gay person discovers his/her difference, or the 'truth' about him/herself at an early age, struggles with telling close friends and family, finds various levels of acceptance and rejection, accommodates accordingly, and learns to love his/her life" (Alexander, 2002: 87). Constantly repeating these type of stories or experiences builds a common consciousness or awareness and a strong community.

The coming out video narrative resembles the instructional videos since coming out videos use the same practices which are used in genres such as do it yourself (DIY)

and how-to videos. These topics vary in coming out videos but the most common questions are: ‘who do I come out first?’, ‘how do I come out?’, ‘is it a good or bad experience?’ (Figure 2-3).



Figure 3. A screenshot of the cover of the video titled 100 Different Ways to Come Out... Almost (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kYEBTac8qmw>)



Figure 4. A screenshot of the cover of the video titled When to Come Out - Ask Meg (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pvvoc3lSGik>)

As an example, in his video named ‘Coming Out’, GayGod (2007) answers the most asked questions to him about his coming out process like. He approaches to the questions like an expert by stating “this video will help you with any of your coming out problems” and answers the questions with a gay flag behind him.

Rhetorically, for lots of LGBTQ individuals, probably the most important issue is when to come out and how to decide when is the propitious moment. In his video, he puts answers in order and start with the rhetorical question “when is the best time to come out?” and says:

Okay so the best time to come out is when you are a little older and independent and on your own, because when you are dependent on your parents they can take away privileges. Like let’s say you have a car or a cell phone, and it’s under their name, they can take it away from you. I know from experience that when I came out of the closet, my mom could take away my computer, which meant my life basically, because I was on the computer all the time talking to my friends, you know going on MySpace, all that fun stuff. But she took it away from me. Because she could. Because she thought it would teach me a lesson. (2007)

As mentioned before, the portrayal of lesbian *Ellen* character in *Ellen* is not only important for the LGBTQ visibility, but also for the rhetoric studies on the queer community. The rhetorical confessional process needs someone since that person will discover the truth because “one does not confess without the presence or (virtual presence) of a partner” (Foucault, 1978: 61). Of course, when DeGeneres came out, the audience was the most important subject which worried her the most. During her *20/20* interview, she mentions her concern as “If they found out I was gay, maybe they wouldn’t applaud, maybe they wouldn’t laugh, maybe they wouldn’t like me if they knew that I was gay” (Adhikari & Francis, 2012). Also, at the time when *Ellen* came out on the Puppy Episode, the rhetoric she uses is very similar to ones being used in modern-day vlog coming out videos. The words she uses and frequent pauses reflected how nervous she was both as a character and as a real lesbian woman:

I can’t even say the word. Why can’t I say the word? I mean, why can’t I just say... I mean, what is wrong... Why do I have to be so ashamed? I mean why can’t I just say the truth, I mean be who I am. I’m thirty-five years old. I’m so afraid to tell people, I mean I just... Susan, I’m gay. (Dow, 2001: 126)

The discourse since *Ellen* first came out has changed. Both in the episode and in real life she mentions “I feel like this tremendous weight has been lifted off of me. I mean, for the first time in my life I feel comfortable with myself” (2001: 125). *Ellen* came out because she felt like she was not able to be her true self among all the heterosexual people that surrounds her, especially in Hollywood. However, now the discourse being used by some vloggers does not focus on the oppression of the heteronormative society. They just want to inspire and support the other LGBTQ individuals.

The way they use the camera is also as important as the discourse of the video. Vloggers use either a webcam or a professional camera but in the both case, they

usually center their face in the frame as a close-up shot and stabilize the camera on a tripod. While coming out, they usually do not directly look at the camera lens and keep their eyes away from the point of view of the audience, as if someone who makes a confession in real life face-to-face communication would do.

Coming out videos do not only attract LGBTQ people; as queer people are now able to find these types of videos very easily; many homophobic people can also find them and make comments just to repress the queer rhetoric with the confidence they get from being anonymous. In other words, such videos contain both a constructive discourse and hate comments, though made very rarely. Nonetheless, coming out videos will continue to be inspirational as long as they build their discourse around the identity, sexuality and community building. It also seems like each group has very similar coming out narratives as gays, lesbians, bisexuals or transgender people. As a discourse, they all use the same type of positive or negative experiences about coming out and how difficult it is to accomplish. The only difference might be the coming out sentence, ‘guys I am gay!’ or ‘guys I’m bisexual!’.

3.3.1 It Gets Better Project: The Rhetoric Movement

The non-profit It Gets Better Project was created by Dan Savage and Terry Miller, after teenagers named Billy Lucas and Justin Aaberg committed suicide in 2010, to reach out to LGBTQ youth who does not have any support from the people around them or feel depressed because of being bullied (Birkey, 2013). The project is active both on YouTube and on the project website itgetsbetter.org. On the website, there are over sixty thousand videos which means that thousands of supportive messages, coming out stories or any type of experiences such as bullying have been uploaded. (Stories, 2017). The idea behind the development of the project is to prevent queer

youth from feeling hopeless and to tell them it gets better. Savage is an author who always speaks at universities but was complaining about how he never got an invitation from middle or high schools. Probably because the authorities were afraid of him and think that he might ‘convince’ the young people to become gay, as if being queer is contagious (Savage & Miller, 2012). Then Savage explains how he came up with the idea of an online video project:

I would never get permission to talk to a gay 13-year-old boy about how great it can be to live as an openly gay adult... And then I thought, why am I waiting for permission, or an invitation, when there's YouTube? (Hartlaub, 2013)

Since YouTube has become the world's biggest online video website, it was the perfect option to create the effect of a face-to-face communication for millions of people all around the world. Before the IGB project was developed, there were already many people who uploaded their coming out videos to show people that they go through hard times too but eventually their life gets better and these types of videos serve the same purpose as IGB does. As an example, the vlogger Jesse Duke's first video on YouTube is called '*Coming Out to my Best Friend, Does It Get Any Better?*', where he talks about coming out to his best friend and the positive support he gets (2013a). After a while later, this time he records a video while coming out to his sister in a very emotional state (2013b). This specific example gives a message to other queer people that they can also establish a similar narrative and he also mentions the reason why he recorded that video:

I filmed it because when I was going through a very hard time I turned to YouTube and I started watching all these coming out videos and seeing how everyone was being very supportive and now I am just trying to give back I guess. (2013b)

On itgetbetter.org's YouTube channel, there are over sixty thousand videos and when combined they all garnered over fifty million views (Stories, 2017). There are lots of videos with different topics on IGBP webpage, but they usually revolve around the LGBTQ identification process through three discourses:

A difficult period in their lives (childhood, adolescence, young adulthood) when they felt different and alone and were ostracized, bullied and harassed by their peers. Coming out, usually indicating when, how and to whom they revealed their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and both the positive and negative responses they received from friends, parents and family members. The fact that 'It Gets Better'; what their life is like now in regard to relationships, friends, family and careers. (Tropiano, 2014: 52)

Lots of artists, singers and actors such as supported the project by uploading their own it gets better video stories but probably the most important one belongs to the former President of the United States, Barack Obama. On the other hand, IGBP offers a guideline to the video makers and instructs them on how they should use the discourse to create a more powerful effect in a most effective way. According to IGBP, uploaders should not use any negativity like self-harm, they should be authentic and sincere, and they should mention that the LGBTQ community is not alone and there many people who can support them (Share Your Story, 2017). Though the topics differ from video to video, they all have one mutual theme and discourse: "no matter how bad things are now, it will get better" (Tropiano, 2014: 52). Though the IGB project does not offer advices on some specific issues LGBTQ people going through, such as an oppressive family, it creates a two-way communication line between young and adult LGBTQ where teenagers can talk to and make friends with more-experienced mature individuals (2014). In addition to that, the project also "offers a tapestry of experiences that testify to multiple forms of family, friendship, community, and support systems that may seem currently unimaginable to isolated queer youths" (Goltz, 2013: 148).

In the next chapter I will analyze the specific people's coming out activities and what they have accomplished for the LGBTQ community, thanks to attention they received after they released their coming out vlog on YouTube.



CHAPTER 4

LGBTQ VLOGGERS' RISE TO STARDOM

Nowadays, it is not possible to imagine social media without very successful and multi-million subscribed social media stars. There are many huge stars in the online universe, reflecting the popularity and the power of the Web 2.0 experience. They are the cyber centers where personal and public desires meet. Even though the history of internet is relatively short, many internet personalities have already built a fame as big as the biggest studio-backed recording or movie artists in the world. Even though some arguments claim that there is a controversy about whether online stars are really stars or not; the channels or accounts of the internet stars continue to be the places where most of the internet consumption takes place.

4.1 YouTube Stardom

Before discussing online stars and their stardom, it is necessary to explain the meanings of star and stardom, and how the star system works. First of all, as Lee Marshall remarks in *The Structural Functions of Stardom in the Recording Industry*, to be able to define the meaning of star, the starting point should differentiate stars and celebrity stars (2013). With a brief definition, the term star refers to someone who gained a great amount of attention because of her/his success or extreme talent

in a particular field. It can be music, science, sports or movie, and now social media. And star celebrities are the people who has/has a distinguished personality that demands the general public fascination and well-knownness along with their careers (Evans, 2005). For example, an Oscar winning, outstanding actor may not be in the public eye all the time, but this does not change their star status while a star celebrity can be on the cover of the magazine or on tabloids, someone who is in the public eye very often. For example, Jennifer Lawrence is a very young and acclaimed actor that even won an Academy Award which makes her a star, but she is also someone who is being chased by the paparazzi and this gives her a star celebrity title. However, the definition of celebrity has changed recently due to the increasing use of social media. Nowadays, someone with a million followers on any social media application, without any acclaimed talent or accomplishment, is also considered as a celebrity (Spurling, 2013).

On the other hand, according to Shankar, the stardom means “the intrinsic ability to take fame and parlay that into an emotional connection with the audience which causes the audience to follow said star’s exploits outside of that star’s specific niche” (2015). There should be an engagement between the star and the audience for stardom to occur and this effect gives people to tell their stories with a different narrative. As Dyer points out:

Stars articulate what it is to be a human being in contemporary society; that is, they express the particular notion we hold of the person, of the ‘individual’. They do so complexly, variously – they are not straightforward affirmations of individualism. On the contrary, they articulate both the promise and the difficulty that the notion of individuality presents for all of us who live by it. (2011: 8)

With that being said, stars actually act like a mirror where other individuals are able to see their reflection and explore their identities while they arouse personal and

political views. People, especially those called fans, create a connection with not only stars' talent but also with their discourse and thus, they can compare their personal lives with the star's so that they can relate to star's 'real personality', rather than the one projected on the screen (Pullen, 2012).

Richard Dyer (2001) classifies the communication between the star and the audience into four categories by referencing the work of Andrew Tudor (1974):

emotional affinity... The audience feels a loose attachment to a particular protagonist... [Creating] a standard sense of involvement.

self-identification. [The audience may] feel as if [they were] themselves on the screen experiencing what [the star does].

imitation. The star acts as some sort of model for the audience.

projection. Imitation merges into projection at the point at which the process becomes more than simple mimicking of clothing, hairstyle, kissing [etc.]. (2001: 18)

These categories show how audiences can interact with a celebrity in a subjective way. This engagement usually transforms peoples point of views and personal choices as they adopt their identity through the star's. The star's impression may lead the audience to tell their versions of the stories, construct an affinity and identification. When famous figures start to tell what they think, their fans who ally value the idea, and help the idea to grow bigger by passing it from one person to the other.

Audience affiliates with the discourse and narration produced by accomplished famous people. A text has the capacity to lecture and attach audiences to each other, any discourse is part of an association between the addressee and the sender, and any such interpersonal connection is crucial part of a broader social relationships. As John Fiske defines, "interpellation refers to the way that any discourse 'hails' the

addressee” (1994: 53). And when the audience realizes that they are the ones being mentioned as ‘us’ in the discourse, most of them immediately embrace the position of the ‘subject’, as suggested.

As a consequence, LGBTQ people associate themselves with this narrative discourse. They can analyze and reproduce new narratives since they can encrypt and decrypt the message when they realize that they belong to that context. Then the affinity becomes a process in which different storytellers share their diversified narratives (Hall, 1980).

In this context, the way that vloggers interpellate their audience creates new storytellers of self-identification. This progress, which is unbothered by the restrictions, repressions and humiliation, improves the communities and their ability to concentrate on the self-identity. Vloggers narrate on both political and personal ideas through establishing a close relationship with their audience while avoiding the pressure by staying out of range of the authorities that control traditional mainstream media.

Nowadays the famous vloggers’ contribution to popular culture on YouTube, especially for the young people, and their transformation from being a regular video maker into being a star, is the most up-to-date example of the power of this discourse and narrative. Though they are not traditional stars emerged from the music or film industry, the way they present themselves in front of the camera and content they produce “encourages audiences to engage with their vernacular and intimate voices” (Pullen, 2012: 22).

As it was mentioned before by Evans (2005), there is a difference between the perception of a stars and a celebrity. But why YouTubers called as ‘stars’ rather than ‘celebrities’? Though it seems like the definition of celebrity is also relevant for YouTube vloggers who constantly reflect their personality, the reason that makes successful video makers them a star is the content they produce. They do not only talk about themselves or their daily life; rather they produce a video content and inform their viewers about something, this can either be a physical object or psychological subject. For example, while a vlogger is talking about the beauty products, the other can talk about the ways to overcome depression.

According to Lowbridge from BBC News, in 2015 there were more than 17,000 YouTube channels that have 100,000 over subscribers, and 1,500 channels with 1 million and over subscribers, (2015). The fact that now YouTube’s vlogs are powerful enough to create world-wide known stars may sound a bit strange to people outside of the YouTube’s viewer demographic. However, today young people spend more time watching online videos than they watch traditional television series (Dredge, 2016).

What turns YouTube video makers into stars is not only their popularity but also their influence on the audience. The surveys conducted by celebrity brand strategist Jeetendr Sehdev, from the University of Southern California, for the popular magazine *Variety* in 2014 and 2015, blatantly reveal the increasing significance of YouTube stars. In 2014, he questioned 1,500 teenage Americans, whose ages varies between 13-18, to rate the ten most popular stars in movies or music and the ten most popular English-language video creators on YouTube, in terms of qualities that represent the ‘influence’. Surprisingly, the first five people on the list were

Youtubers including Smosh, the Fine Bros, PewDiePie, KSI and Ryan Higa. These five people were rated with scores higher than international superstars such as the singer Katy Perry and Academy Award winner actress Jennifer Lawrence (Ault, 2014).

Moreover, when Sehdev repeated the same survey in 2015, this time Youtubers took the top five spots, surpassing superstars like Taylor Swift and Bruno Mars (Ault, 2015) (Figure 5).



Figure 5. The first 8 people on the survey provided by Variety.
 (<http://variety.com/2015/digital/news/youtubers-teen-survey-ksi-pewdiepie-1201544882>)

As Sehdev analyze the survey more thoroughly, he explored that YouTube stars are rated considerably higher than mainstream stars in different lists related to the characteristic of a person for example Youtubers were evaluated as being more captivating, unique and identifiable than Hollywood personalities. He explains:

Looking at survey comments and feedback, teens enjoy an intimate and authentic experience with YouTube celebrities, who aren't subject to image strategies carefully orchestrated by PR pros. Teens also say they appreciate YouTube stars' more candid sense of humor, lack of filter and risk-taking spirit, behaviors often curbed by Hollywood handlers. (2014)

The questionnaire reveals that young peoples' perceptions have changed about stardom because they think that Hollywood stars do not have the characteristics mentioned above. What makes YouTube stars engaging is that their ability to be 'normal' and 'relatable' in the eyes of the audience. Since Hollywood stars belong to an "unreachable" upper class in society, they are not able to establish a deep sense of intimacy, they cannot make their fans feel like they are the boys or girls next door, but YouTubers can (Dredge, 2016). Sehdev mentions that the content created by YouTubers turns into a contagious trend that "the level of advocacy teens have about YouTube stars is out of control" (Ault, 2015).

Sehdev also anticipates that there will not be any Hollywood star on the Top 20 of the influential stars list in the next 5 years. Every top spot will be occupied by YouTubers in the near future because their teenage fan base will be more loyal as they age. As long as they remain authentic and sincere they will gain more reputation for what they do. The same survey confronts that the interviewees' connection level to the YouTube stars is almost seven times more than to the traditional artist while they also "perceived as 17 times more engaging, and 11 times more extraordinary, than mainstream stars" (Ault, 2015).

As mentioned in previous chapters, one of the main reasons for this connection to occur is the affiliation the audience feel towards the video makers who usually talk directly to the camera, and makes their viewers feel like they are having an intimate direct conversation. In 2016, the distinction between the Hollywood and YouTube

stars were blurred not because of traditional artists' interest in recording vlogs, but because of YouTube stars' engagement with the Hollywood productions (Dredge, 2016).

As their stardom grows, some even earn seven-figure salaries thanks to the videos they publish by partnering with many high-end brands and collaborating with mainstream media organs like reality programs and TV series. This ambiguity might irritate the fans of videos like make-up or gaming, but the increasing visibility of queer vloggers from YouTube and being seen on the TV or other platforms might be good for LGBTQ community's needs because whether LGBTQ vloggers are participating with these types of mediums for money or not, one thing is guaranteed: broader opportunities for the LGBTQ youth to see more representations of their identity.

4.2 From Coming Out to Stardom: LGBTQ Stars on YouTube

In the past ten years, coming out on YouTube has become a trend among the LGBTQ youth especially with those who want to participate in the acculturation process. Today, lots of people are coming out on YouTube and it already has turned into a movement. Though there are lots of troll accounts and homophobic users, LGBTQ stars on YouTube know that being honest with their viewers makes them popular. First thing these coming out videos teach to the audience is the importance of acting strategic while coming to parents or friends, and the people who live as closeted or in rural areas might need someone that can guide them throughout the process (Temblador, 2015). If their parents react in a negative way when they come out, they can open YouTube and see the other examples of bad coming out

experiences and do not feel lonely because of their families' reactions. As gay activist and journalist Dan Savage stresses with a question:

Is [coming out on YouTube] creepy or manipulative? Maybe, but I think the impulse of these kids is to leverage better behavior from their parents. If the parents react badly, there are witnesses and social consequences for their reaction. In this situation, I think being strategic is smart and necessary. (Peters, 2015)

Lots of people, even including Olympic athletes, have come out and became viral with millions of views and subscribers and thousands of comments they garnered. The number of the positive and supportive comments below the videos are always more than the negative and hateful ones. These comments offer a peaceful and positive platform where people can be who they want to be. It would not be fair to say that some LGBTQ vloggers have turned into stars thanks to their coming out videos since some of these star vloggers have more than four hundred videos, which means they have already put so much energy and work to build their stardom through their YouTube channels. If their main aim was to be a star, they would start their YouTube career with a coming out video. On the contrary, many of them decide to come out to their audience after they upload several other vlogs. In addition to that, they also do not stop after they publish their coming out videos or garner millions of views. They continue to be out and sustain their public presence.

Starting with Tyler Oakley, who is considered as the most effective 'superstar' vlogger on YouTube for the LGBTQ rights and lifestyle and one of the biggest gay right activists. Twenty-eight-year old openly gay YouTuber started posting videos in 2007 and it was a regular vlogger channel with videos about his everyday life. Since now he is a worldwide YouTube phenomenon, with nearly 7.8 million subscribers

and garnered a total of 647 million views with his more than 500 videos uploaded (Oakley, 2018).

Oakley uses his platform to raise consciousness about coming out, queer politics and LGBTQ youth suicides (Romano, 2013). He emphasizes the importance of YouTube for young queer people and their sexual identity development:

YouTube is a place for people from all over the world to feel less alone. When I was younger and still in the closet, I couldn't just google 'coming out story' to help me articulate what I was going through. Now, there are tens of thousands of first-person accounts that could help people make sense of their identities. (Berg, 2016)

Oakley shares his personal experiences with coming out and how his dad rejected him because of his sexual orientation while his mom and step-dad were very supportive. His very religious father actually forced him to turn straight by using Christian doctrines and he even sent his son to a Catholic school, but the pressures eventually got him into anxiety and depression (Ellis-Petersen, 2015). His father basically tried to use the old-fashioned practice of conversion therapy to "cure" Oakley's sexuality with the help of religion. Though he actually never came out on YouTube, because he came out when he was fourteen-years old and YouTube did not even exist at the time, the supportive videos he prepared and the positive discourse he used to navigate people into better directions have turned Oakley into a YouTube legend. Thus, his vlogs belong to the supportive type of subgenre, where he talks about coming out to support other LGBTQ, but not *coming out* to his viewers. When he first started publishing videos he only had a few subscribers, but he was making references to the issues of LGBTQ community like coming out and gay marriage. For example, in his video he posted on the coming out day in 2011

named *The “Coming Out” Challenge*, Oakley expresses with an encouraging rhetoric:

To me National Coming Out Day signifies a moment where we can take some time to appreciate the courage and braveness that it takes to truly be yourself no matter what your self may be, and being honest and open about who you are. And I think one of the most amazing things about coming out of the closet is that it shows the world you are so much more than your sexuality. When you are able to find and express your truth and show the world that is not that big of a deal and it is not completely who you are, it is just a small fraction of who you are as a person. (2011)

Tyler Oakley’s impact was so huge, that his support the LGBTQ community through his vlogs not only inspired random individuals who seeks support, but even the worldwide known superstar such as Ricky Martin, who also came out as gay in 2015, confessed that watching one the vlogs created by Oakley helped him to decide to come out and he expressed this by thanking and sending a tweet to Oakley (Figure 6). He states that this was the moment when he realized that he was an inspiration to so many people and also mentioned “you never know who is watching and you never know who you can impact. You never know the ripple effect that can happen” (HuffPostLive, 2015).



Ricky Martin ✓

@ricky_martin

Takip et



#Fact Watching this video helped me make a very important decision! I'm serious. Thank you Mr. @tyleroakley

İngilizce dilinden çevir



National Coming Out Day 2008

Join our Twitter family: <http://twitter.com/tyleroakley> Binge (book):
<http://tyleroakleybook.com> Snervous (documentary):
<http://bit.ly/SnervousiTunes> Psychob...
youtube.com

19:50 - 11 Eki 2012

Figure 6. The screenshot of the tweet sent by Ricky Martin.
(<https://twitter.com/tyleroakley/status/256453630645907456>)

In 2014, Barack Obama held a meeting with the top YouTubers on how to reach the online audiences, and Taylor Oakley was one of the people who have been invited to the White House as an advisor to attend a meeting with the President. The meeting's aim was to get an idea about how to create a better communication between the Oval Office and the top YouTubers community (Spangler, 2014). Oakley not only became one of the social media advisors of Barack Obama, he also made an interview with the former first lady Michelle Obama about the importance of higher education, later that year. Mrs. Obama appeared on one of Tyler's vlogs to discuss and promote her initiative that encourages young people to go to college (Gutelle, 2014). In other words, even the first lady sees Oakley's platform as a powerful tool to reach out the young people (Figure 7).



Figure 7. The photograph from Michelle Obama and Tyler Oakley's interview.
(<https://www.dailydot.com/upstream/tyler-oakley-michelle-obama/>)

In 2015, Oakley was one of the names in the *Time*'s The 30 Most Influential People on the Internet list among very famous and powerful people like Justin Bieber, Beyoncé, J.K. Rowling and Barack Obama (*Time*, 2015). In addition to all of these achievements, again in 2015 his book *Binge* made *The New York Times*'s best seller list at number two (Gutelle, 2015).

In 2016, he was nominated for a People's Choice Award for favorite YouTube star and became the host of *The Tyler Oakley Show* on Ellen Degeneres' digital network after appearing as a guest on *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* (Petski, 2016). Combining the forces of YouTube's most popular gay icon and the TV's most powerful lesbian figure was one of the biggest steps for the visibility of the LGBTQ people in the US (Figure 8).



Figure 8. The photograph from Tyler Oakley's appearance on the Ellen DeGeneres Show. (<http://www.tubefilter.com/2016/09/21/the-tyler-oakley-show-ellen-degeneres-ellentube/>)

Whatever he has done, he has always been able to intimate and preserve his close relationship with his audience. Tyler has used his YouTube fame and stardom to help other people and create more visibility and awareness. Though he has participated in lots of projects throughout his YouTube career to support LGBTQ people, probably the most important one was, and still is, The Trevor Project which was founded in 1988 with the aim of preventing suicides among LGBTQ youth. They offer the Trevor Lifeline through a free telephone line with trained counselors. Anyone who thinks about suicide or feels lonely can call the line and get help by talking to the counselors without being judged (O'Connell, 2017).

Oakley has been affiliated with the Trevor Project since 2009 and started raising money for the project in 2013 by using his YouTube platform and asking his viewers to donate. In one of his videos he asked for donations not presents for his birthday by saying: "I was thinking for the entire month of March, instead of you guys sending me birthday presents to my PO box, why don't we band together and save some lives

with the Trevor Project?” (Oakley, 2013). In 2014, he repeated the same birthday campaign and this time his aim was to raise \$150,000, but thanks to his broad range of audience and the power of his visibility, he was able to raise more than \$520,000 by surpassing his expectations. Again in 2015 with a similar effort, he raised more than \$530,000. In just two years, Oakley was able to raise more than a million dollars for the Trevor Project. On this success, he states: “to see the impact my platform can have on the online community and bringing awareness to The Trevor Project message has been the most important thing I think I’ll ever accomplish” (Schawbel, 2016).

Oakley’s support was also recognized by YouTube itself. When the same-sex marriage was recognized in the United States in 2015, YouTube released a blog post to celebrate the marriage equality. They thanked some of the video creators for showing courage and raising awareness LGBTQ awareness such as Ellen DeGeneres, Todrick Hall and Tyler Oakley (YouTube, 2015).

Another successful YouTuber who turned her online appearance into a stardom is twenty-five-year old Gigi Gorgeous, whose real name is Giselle Loren Lazzarato. Gigi has been documenting her life since high school, since she was a he and he was ‘gay’. She has used the platform to share her story, breakdown the stigma and even to come out, twice; first as gay and then as transgendered. Gigi has collected a ton of fans, including Hollywood celebrities. She has more than 2.7 million subscribers and her 455 videos have been viewed more than a total of 420 million times as of January 2018 (Gorgeous, 2018). Thanks to her authenticity and support, she has turned herself into a star. She hosted at the Video Music Awards and even interviewed by ABC News (Riegle, Lefferman & Valiente, 2016).

She started posting make-up tutorials and fashion vlogs as a guy named Gregory Gorgeous, before she transitioned, and came out on YouTube as gay in 2010. The coming out video titled *I am Gay (Coming Out Story)* was viewed more than 2.8 million times and was liked 38,000 times while disliked by a thousand (Gorgeous, 2010). In the video, while he comes out as gay, he also explains the reasons why he wears make-up and how he feels about it:

It does not matter if people look at you weird. I knew that I wanted to wear make-up, it is part of who I am. Wearing make-up, doing hair, dressing up and being a diva, it is totally me. I cannot hide that, I cannot suppress that. I need to show it, I need to be who I am. (2010)

And in 2013, Gigi came out as transgendered. In the video, titled *I Am Transgender*, she says: “basically, this video is kind of me telling you guys that I want to be female. I have felt for a very long time now that I was a girl trapped inside of a boy’s body” (Gorgeous, 2013). Since she came out on YouTube, two times, her videos belong to coming out subgenre, where she comes out in front of the camera. Her transgender coming out video was viewed more than 3.8 million times and received 87,000 messages and a large majority of which are very positive and supportive (Figure 9). She shared almost every step of her transitioning process through the vlogs on a regular basis, focusing on the hormones she is using, the face surgery and breast augmentation surgery she underwent (Collins, 2017). And eventually she became a role model for everyone who is considering a transition from male to female. The video has a 4% of dislike and 96% like ratio and total of 18,000 thousand comments were made on the video. Even though some of the comments are homophobic and hateful, the majority of them were positive messages like shown in Figure 9.

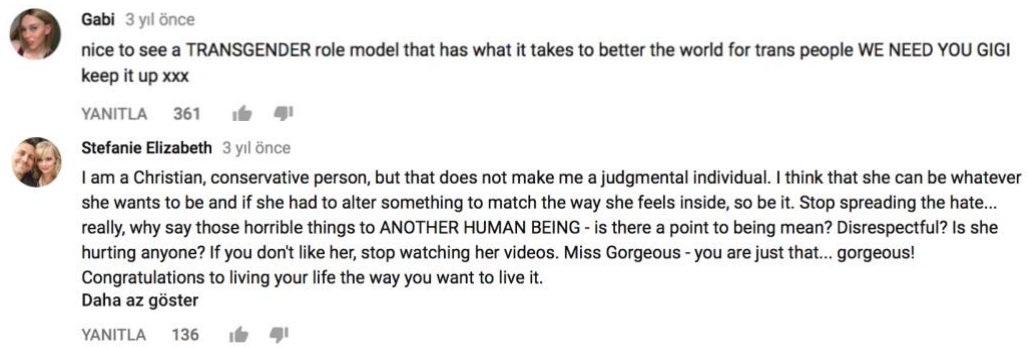


Figure 9. The screenshots of two of the most liked comments below the I Am Transgender. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=srOsriC9Gj8>)



Figure 10. The before and after images of Gigi Gorgeous. (<http://andrewsbookclub.com/gigi-before-and-after/>)

Through her platform, she is also sharing the injustices she is facing with as a transgender woman. For example, in 2016 Gorgeous was detained and held for five hours because of being a trans individual at the Dubai Airport and the authorities did not let her enter the country (Chavez, 2016). In her vlog, which was recorded when she was still in the airport, she said that the incident was one of the scariest moments of her entire life by adding “it absolutely disgusts me that this kind of discrimination still goes on, but I just wanted to tell you what I have gone through just because I am transgender” (Gorgeous, 2016). Her reproach received wide media coverage.

Her story was so inspirational for many people that at the very beginning of 2017, Gorgeous released a documentary movie called *This is Everything* directed by the Academy Award winner Barbara Kopple. The trailer of the documentary was viewed more than 50 million (Gorgeous, 2017). The documentary premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and it presents both physical and psychological changes in Lazzarato's life throughout her transitioning process including losing her mother to cancer. That moment takes a lot of space since she points out that the thing that triggered her to transition was her loss of her mom. In the movie, the audience also gets to see the support she received from her father, which sets a very good example for other transgender individuals' families. He says: "I'm glad you're doing what you want to do; it's just hard for an old guy to understand" (Harvey, 2017).

Moreover, these two LGBTQ icons were honored by the Out Web Fest, which celebrates the queer storytelling online, for their contributions to raise LGBTQ visibility and acknowledgement on YouTube. Oakley was given the Vanguard Award while Gorgeous received the Vision Award for the optimism, encouragement and bravery they put in their videos (Dupuis, 2017).

The other LGBTQ star is not only appreciated for coming out on YouTube, but also, or being renown Olympic diver: twenty-three-year old Tom Daley. On his verified channel, he has more than 550 thousand subscribers and has posted 360 vlogs since 2010 that garnered a total of 58 million views (TvTomDaley, 2018).

He was already a charming public figure with his successful athletic career life and the exercise or food vlogs he posts. Therefore, his coming out on YouTube received excessive media attention. The video was viewed 6 million times in just two days, and as of today, it has more than 12 million views. It is the third most viewed coming

out video in YouTube's history. Since he came out on YouTube, his video belongs to coming out subgenre, where he comes out in front of the camera. Thirty-nine thousand comments were made on the video titled *Tom Daley: Something I want to say...* and was liked by the viewers impressively for 222 thousand times, and disliked only for 11 thousand times (TvTomDaley, 2013). Though 11 thousand may seem a lot, when it is considered that YouTube is an infamous place for its troll homophobic commenters, a 4.7% dislike and 95.3% like ratio actually presents a very positive image (Figure 11) and not only dislikes are dramatically outnumbered by the likes the video gates, LGBTQ individuals also stick together by supporting the decision of vlogger when a hateful comment is made (Figure 12).

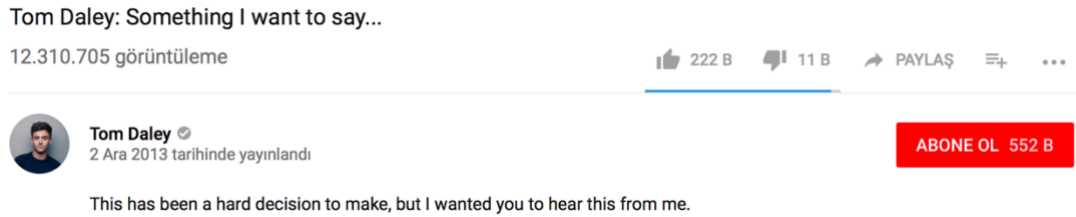


Figure 11. The screenshot of the number of the likes, dislikes and views of the video Tom Daley: Something I want to say.... (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJwJnoB9EKw&t=1s>)

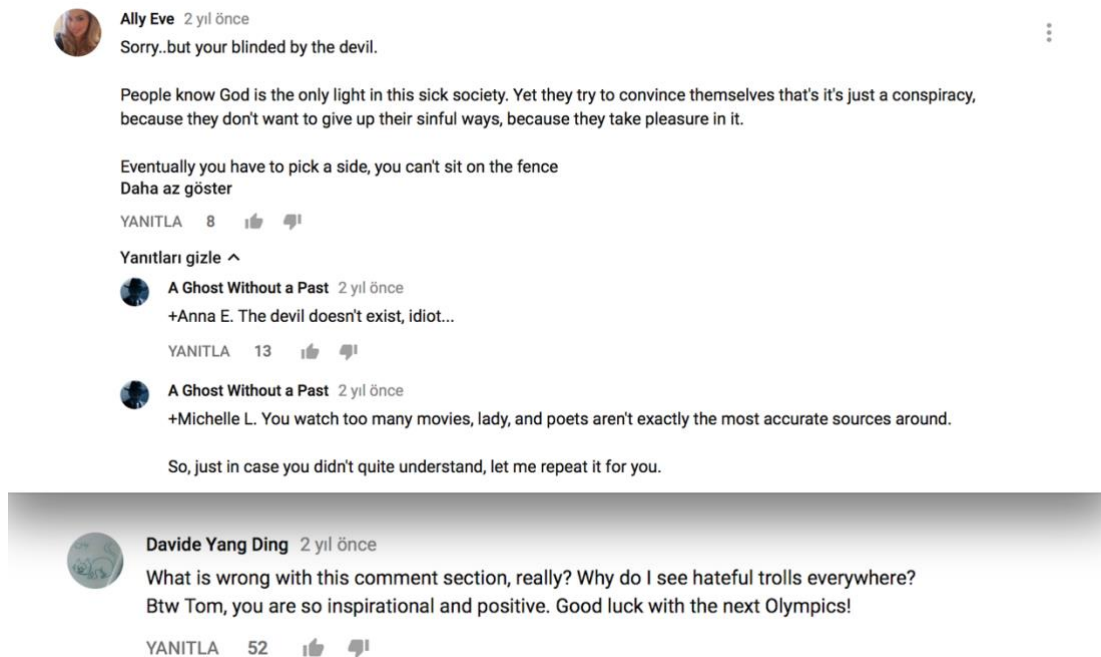


Figure 12. The screenshot of one of the negative comments and the reaction it got below the video Tom Daley: Something I want to say.... (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJwJnoB9EKw>)

The rhetoric Daley uses is very similar to that mentioned in previous chapters.

Unintentional frequent pauses and the stressful tone of his voice indicates his nervousness, but also gives a sign something important is about to be revealed, that a confession is about to be made. He mentions that he created this video to put an end to all the rumors about his personal life and sexuality, while also complaining about the heterosexist questions he was asked:

One thing I've never been comfortable talking about is my relationships; even if I do sporting interviews, it's, 'Do you have a girlfriend? Who are you seeing?'... I've been dating girls and I've never really had a serious relationship.... Now I feel ready.... My life changed, massively. I met someone and they made me feel so happy and safe.... And that someone is a guy. (TvTomDaley, 2013)

Since he was already a public figure before he came out, he could use various media organs to come out, instead chose to go with his own channel. Using his YouTube vlog to come out allowed him to convey his message the way he wants – authentic and sincere. He either did not want to do a newspaper interview so his words would not be twisted, or a TV interview so he would not be asked irrelevant and manipulative questions (Magrath, Cleland & Anderson, 2017). Four years later in 2017, Daley used his YouTube channel to share his wedding video with his Oscar winner and LGBTQ rights activist husband Dustin Lance Black as a vlog (Figure 13). He not only supported LGBTQ visibility through his coming out on YouTube, but he also promoted the acculturation process by sharing a part of his very special and intimate wedding footage.



Figure 13. The screenshot of the cover of the video Tom Daley and Dustin Lance Black's Wedding Video. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rdDR1QqMiCg&t=2s>)

In 2007, Tom Daley and Dustin Lance Black took the stage as a married couple in London Pride where Black gave a very uplifting and empowering speech on LGBTQ rights. He stated the importance of visibility by saying: “we are stronger together with our brothers and our sisters, so this cannot be your only moment of visibility, not this year” (Wood, 2017). The couple also jointly received the Influencer of the Year Prize at the British LGBTQ Awards in 2017 (McIntyre, 2017).

It is also worth mentioning that these vloggers do not become stars suddenly right after they come out on YouTube. They have been publishing videos on YouTube for many years, and simultaneously build their stardom with each video they post and every new viewer they gain. For example, vloggers like Tyler and Gigi have been posting constructive videos for years and their fame came after hundreds of videos. Like real successful TV, film or music stars these YouTube stars also have to have more than one effective and powerful video to touch and inspire so many people (MediaKix, 2017).

Some appear on famous TV shows and some make movies, but as long as they continue to do what made them famous, supporting the LGBTQ community on their vlogs with their ‘true and authentic selves’, unaffected by fame, their audience does not question their sincerity. They are still putting a lot of work into their YouTube channels by uploading a video every week, sometimes more, on a regular basis and they are still under the pressure of losing their audience if they cannot impress them any longer (PlaidPress, 2015).

To sum up, the LGBTQ YouTube vloggers have become millions of peoples’ online gay, lesbian or trans best friends. With their leadership, YouTube acts like a powerful microphone handed an outcast. Though they are seen and accepted as LGBTQ stars or the voices of the minority, they actually show other people that they can have a voice. Moreover, most of LGBTQ youth idolize LGBTQ vlogger stars they watch and these stars constantly expose their life, at some point the audience start to desire to be as successful or free as they are and to be better at what they do. Though viewers never realize, the vlogger stars help them to create a better future through giving the message that “if we can do, you can do it, too!”.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Sexuality is a process during which one has to learn and explore through experiences and if LGBTQ people do not have a role model around them, they open YouTube and try to discover other people like themselves. Throughout this thesis it was argued that the importance of coming out videos on YouTube were essential to the establishment of LGBTQ identity. As coming out means ‘revealing one’s sexuality to others, queer people actually seek online techniques which can help them to handle the process in an easy way. Therefore, informal learning is very common among LGBTQ individuals, specifically during the time when they start to embrace their sexuality or get ready to come out to other people.

What this thesis suggests with ‘the importance of online coming out videos’ is that by using vlogs, queer youth turned YouTube into a space where the experiences of sexual identity are collected and shared. However, this feeling of affinity occurs under specific conditions and the crucial one is body placement. In every coming out video, the narrator positions his/her face to the camera as a sign of keeping communication channels open. This gesture creates the feeling of a face to face conversation, with the vlogger confessing something to the viewer. The comments feature is another essential tool and it strengthens the notion of feeling an affinity

towards something or someone. It not only allows users to communicate with each other, but also expresses their ideas about the vlogger or the video, which helps the audience to form a community. By subscribing to the video maker's channel, the audience engages with the vlogger knowing that their relationship will not end with a coming out video. On the contrary, the vlogger will continue to share the updates about his/her life. So, their connection stays stable as long as the vlogger continues to make videos.

Whether they realize it or not, every vlogger who shares his/her coming out video on YouTube as a personal revelation also supports the creation of a common pool of information. In this sense, queer youth can either take advantage of the LGBTQ community on YouTube by acculturating him/herself through coming out videos or contribute by sharing his/her story. Of course, always can do both. They actually not only do what YouTube's slogan 'broadcast yourself' encourages them to do, but they also go beyond it by creating an online community. By exploring identities online, they start to expand their queerness into their everyday life.

Each coming out video triggers a chain reaction because in many coming out videos, vloggers mention a previous coming out video that affected or encouraged them to come out, even sometimes superstars like Ricky Martin. This domino effect reinforces the support system theory of coming out videos, especially visibility, for many vloggers are acculturated through the discourse used in coming out videos. Then they use their voices to influence other people.

Although the number of TV or movie characters that are identified with queerness is on the rise, coming out videos still remain the best option for queer youth, especially those who live in rural areas, to display the problems they are facing just because of

who they are. Instead of waiting for his/her personal representation on TV or permission from oppressive heterosexist society, queer youth are now overcoming obstacles by producing their own narratives and role models by simply showing their real selves through online videos.

On the other hand, the use of coming out videos both by the It Gets Better Project and Human Rights Campaign's Coming Out Day actually support the main point of this thesis. Both formed to prevent LGBTQ youth from harming themselves or feeling lonely and allow them to embrace their true and authentic selves by presenting other successful examples.

The visibility coming out videos gain with YouTube enables LGBTQ to encounter role models as well homophobic users. Additionally, content analysis of the comments lends credibility to the idea that though there are many homophobic, heterosexist and anti-gay comments, they do not prevent queer people from constructing an online community. On the contrary; they stick together to fend a bully or a troll off their cyber community space, as can be seen from the comment screenshots. This is why the use of coming out or any other type of LGBTQ-related videos on YouTube is worth considering as a virtual community, where queer people acquire both their visibility and a sensed culture.

Moreover, as successful LGBTQ vloggers' stardom grows, more people watch their representations, even on the mainstream media. Though it seems like it is only important to queer people, it actually also changes heterosexual peoples' minds about homosexuality and creates acceptance. LGBTQ people watch vloggers, such as Tyler Oakley and Gigi Gorgeous, who are appreciated for what they do and give them hope to be successful and happy as who they are. However, they also take away lessons by

digesting what vloggers have gone through. It is not difficult to come to the conclusion that successful and well-known LGBTQ vloggers are inspirational because they are accessible, relatable and authentic. These vlogs have proved that for every homophobic who denies or bullies LGBTQ individuals, there is someone supportive out there.

This thesis also reveals that homophobia is still a very effective tool of hatred. Though this thesis mainly focuses on vlogs produced in the West or with a western point of view, the struggle against homophobia continues everywhere, even in so-called “developed” countries. Living in a country where same-sex marriage is legal does not prevent homophobia. Even Tyler Oakley, a person who raised millions of dollars for LGBTQ youth and inspired thousands to develop a real sexual identity, had a trouble with his father’s homophobia. The aim of this thesis was not to compare the struggles of LGBTQ individuals; rather, it was to show how lots of people try to overcome them by watching or making coming out vlogs. In the end, viewers learn about LGBTQ culture and establish a sense of belonging towards a group of people like themselves.

It is also worth mentioning that the reason why this thesis does not mention any Turkish vloggers is that, there is not any LGBTQ Turkish vloggers who comes out on YouTube, not even a single one. Since Turkish society is very traditional, people do not want to be recognized on the streets and become a target or they fear for being labeled. However, as these vloggers stars have fans all around the world, it is certain that many Turkish LGBTQ also watch and get inspired by coming out vlogs.

LGBTQ icons on YouTube might have a high number of subscribers or views but other less-popular videos’ effects cannot and should not be ignored, especially

considering the fact that at some point, someone posted the first coming out video on YouTube. Whether with one view or a million views, as long as that video makes audience members feel like they are not alone and different, the LGBTQ community still needs these inspirational moments. The political movement they try to achieve by coming out publicly on YouTube turns their online platform into a form of inspirational stardom.

Consequently, from movies to TV series and now with vlogs, LGBTQ visibility is in a golden age. This thesis illustrates how aspects like freedom, availability, simplicity and authenticity found in online vlogs separates them from any other medium. Therefore, this study conveys how LGBTQ visibility and acculturation processes are constructed through YouTube and how coming out videos influence the modern-day gender identification process and queer theory.

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