Gay but Not Gay?:Phenomenology of Loneliness Among Selected Gay white male Youtubers

Brian Bantugan, PhD

St. Paul University Manila

Abstract: This study explored gay loneliness through single, under-10-minute YouTube videos by four adult male YouTubers, examining how these narratives align with pre- and post-social media representations. Employing Bantugan's (2024) approach blending phenomenology and online data mining, the research focused on textual analysis of videos transcribed using kome.ai. Applying Heideggerian phenomenology, themes emerged: Participant 1 discussed childhood loneliness and post-coming out relief, embracing solitude for self-discovery. Participant 2 lamented superficial gay community connections, seeking solace in art and advocating for authenticity. Participant 3 approached loneliness with humor and proactive self-care, prioritizing happiness and self-worth. Participant 4 addressed societal disapproval's impact, advocating for community solidarity and authentic companionship amidst loneliness. These narratives reflect findings on gay loneliness, highlighting social stigma, relationship challenges, and the role of supportive communities. Gay YouTubers prioritize self-acceptance, identity exploration, and meaningful LGBTQ+ connections, resonating with audiences navigating similar journeys. They openly discuss struggles with identity and mental health, destigmatizing issues like depression and anxiety, while critiquing societal norms and advocating for LGBTQ+ rights. These narratives underscore the complex interplay of social, psychological, and community factors influencing gay men's experiences of loneliness and resilience.

Keywords: Gay White Male, Loneliness, YouTube, Phenomenology, Online Data Mining

I.   Introduction

The Internet has profoundly transformed social landscapes, particularly for marginalized communities such as gender-divergent individuals, including gay men. Historically, marginalized groups often faced exclusion and limited representation in mainstream media and society, leading to feelings of isolation and invisibility (Lindley et al., 2020). The advent of the Internet provided a pivotal platform where these communities could connect, express themselves, and find solidarity globally.

Firstly, the Internet offered a space for visibility and representation. Before digital platforms, media representations of gender-divergent individuals, including gays, were often stereotypical or absent altogether. Online forums, social media, and content-sharing platforms enabled individuals to create and share authentic narratives, challenging stereotypes and fostering a sense of community (Grey & Robinson, 2013). For instance, platforms like YouTube allowed LGBTQ+ individuals to share personal stories, advocacy efforts, and artistic expressions, which in turn helped to normalize diverse identities and experiences.

Secondly, the Internet facilitated connections and support networks. Many marginalized individuals, including gay men, faced geographic isolation due to local stigmatization or lack of visible community spaces. Online forums and social networking sites provided avenues for individuals to find others with similar

experiences and challenges, offering emotional support, advice, and a sense of belonging (Clark et al., 2017). These digital communities transcended geographical boundaries, allowing individuals to connect across cities, countries, and continents, thereby reducing the impact of physical isolation.

Thirdly, the Internet became a resource for information and education. In many societies, information about sexual orientation, gender identity, and LGBTQ+ issues were limited or biased. Online platforms enabled access to accurate information, resources for self-discovery, and opportunities for learning about activism and advocacy (Bossewitch, 2017). This accessibility empowered individuals to navigate their identities openly and informed decisions about coming out, relationships, and community involvement.

Moreover, the Internet provided a platform for activism and mobilization. Online advocacy campaigns, petitions, and awareness initiatives amplified the voices of marginalized communities, including gay men, on a global scale (Holt, 2015). Social media campaigns addressing discrimination, promoting legal rights, and advocating for social change garnered widespread attention and support, influencing public discourse and policy decisions.Thus, the Internet has become a vital lifeline for marginalized communities, providing spaces for visibility, connection, education, and advocacy. For gender-divergent communities, including gays, digital platforms have played a crucial role in fostering acceptance, resilience, and collective empowerment in the face of societal marginalization.

However, while the Internet has been transformative for gender-divergent communities like gays, it also presents challenges. Online spaces can be prone to harassment, misinformation, and exploitation. Likewise, digital divides based on access to technology and digital literacy can exclude some individuals from benefiting fully from online resources and communities (Nash, 2017).

Dating Applications and Social Media for Gays

Dating apps and social media platforms have had a complex impact on the lives of gay individuals, both empowering and, in some ways, further marginalizing them within society.

Facilitated Connections Amidst Marginalization. Dating apps initially provided a revolutionary way for gay men to connect with each other, especially in areas where offline LGBTQ+ communities were limited or unsafe. Apps like Grindr, Tinder, and Ok Cupid allowed individuals to explore their sexuality discreetly and connect with potential partners without the need for physical LGBTQ+ spaces, which were often subject to societal stigma and discrimination (Smith et al., 2020). This facilitated greater access to potential relationships and reduced feelings of isolation for many gay men.

Impact on Body Image and Self-Worth. However, dating apps have also contributed to the commodification of bodies and appearance-based judgments, which can exacerbate issues related to body image and self-esteem among gay men (Race, 2020). The emphasis on physical attractiveness on these platforms can reinforce narrow standards of beauty, leading to feelings of inadequacy or exclusion for individuals who do not fit those ideals (Albury, 2016). This aspect of dating apps can perpetuate internalized homophobia and contribute to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression (Race, 2020).

Normalization of Casual Encounters. Moreover, dating apps have normalized casual sexual encounters within the gay community, often reducing relationships to purely physical interactions. This normalization can reinforce stereotypes about gay men as hypersexual and commitment-phobic, marginalizing those who seek deeper emotional connections or long-term relationships (Ward, 2018). The prevalence of hook-up culture on these platforms may inadvertently perpetuate feelings of loneliness and emotional disconnection among gay individuals seeking meaningful connections beyond the sexual realm (Smith et al., 2020).

Impact on Community Spaces. Social media platforms have also affected traditional LGBTQ+ community spaces. While they provide opportunities for virtual community building and activism, they can also divert attention and resources away from physical LGBTQ+ venues and organizations (Albury, 2016). This shift has implications for the visibility and sustainability of these spaces, which historically have served as crucial hubs for social support, advocacy, and cultural expression within the gay community, including dating.

Digital Discrimination and Safety Concerns. Furthermore, dating apps and social media platforms have exposed gay individuals to new forms of discrimination and safety risks. Instances of discrimination based on race, age, HIV status, and other factors like spirituality (Bantugan, 2006) have been documented on these platforms, highlighting ongoing challenges in creating inclusive digital environments (Smith et al., 2020). Safety concerns, including harassment, catfishing, and threats of violence, remain prevalent issues for LGBTQ+ individuals navigating online spaces (Ward, 2018).

Hence, while dating apps and social media platforms have provided unprecedented opportunities for connection and visibility for gay individuals, they have also introduced new challenges and risks. These platforms have influenced societal perceptions of gay men, impacted self-esteem and body image, and reshaped traditional community dynamics. Moving forward, addressing these challenges requires ongoing efforts to promote inclusivity, combat discrimination, and foster healthier digital environments that support the diverse needs and experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals.

YouTube and Gay Visibility

YouTube has played a significant role in enhancing the visibility and representation of gay individuals in society, contributing to greater acceptance and understanding of LGBTQ+ experiences. This platform has provided a space where gay creators can share their stories, perspectives, and challenges openly, thereby challenging stereotypes and fostering empathy among viewers.

Personal Narratives and Authentic Representation. One of the primary ways YouTube has improved gay visibility is through personal narratives shared by LGBTQ+ creators. These individuals use their channels to discuss their coming out stories, experiences with discrimination, relationships, and daily life as a gay person (Bantugan et al., 2017). By offering authentic and relatable portrayals, these videos humanize the LGBTQ+ community, making it easier for viewers, both within and outside the community, to empathize with their struggles and celebrate their triumphs (Gray, 2018).

Educational Content and Advocacy. YouTube has also become a platform for educational content about LGBTQ+ issues (Bantugan, 2023; Bantugan, 2922). Creators and organizations produce videos that explain terminology, discuss the history of LGBTQ+ rights movements, and address common misconceptions and prejudices. This educational content helps viewers gain a deeper understanding of sexual orientation and gender identity diversity, contributing to more informed and inclusive societal attitudes (Gray, 2018).

Building Community and Support Networks. For many LGBTQ+ individuals, YouTube serves as a virtual community where they can find support, connect with others who share similar experiences, and seek advice on topics ranging from coming out to navigating relationships. This sense of community is crucial, especially for those living in environments where LGBTQ+ visibility and support are limited (Fiesler&Proferes, 2018).

Celebrating Diversity and Representation. YouTube has also facilitated the celebration of LGBTQ+ diversity in entertainment and media. Creators produce content that showcases LGBTQ+ culture, art, music, and fashion, providing visibility to a wide range of identities and expressions within the community. This

representation not only empowers LGBTQ+ individuals to embrace their identities but also challenges societal norms and encourages acceptance of diverse gender and sexual identities (Fiesler&Proferes, 2018).

Impact on Social Change and Policy. Beyond individual empowerment, YouTube has contributed to broader social change by amplifying LGBTQ+ voices in advocacy and activism. Videos discussing LGBTQ+ rights, campaigns for equality, and critiques of discriminatory policies have mobilized viewers to support legislative changes and societal reforms that promote LGBTQ+ rights and protections (Gray, 2018).

As such, YouTube has been instrumental in improving gay visibility in society by providing a platform for personal narratives, educational content, community building, and advocacy. Through these efforts, YouTube has helped challenge stereotypes, foster empathy, celebrate diversity, and advocate for LGBTQ+ rights, contributing to greater acceptance and understanding of gay individuals in society at large.

Social media's influence over public opinion and building a culture of empathy for gays

Social media platforms, including but not limited to YouTube, play a crucial role in shaping public opinion and fostering a culture of empathy towards gay individuals. Here's how social media influences public opinion and contributes to empathy:

Personal Narratives and Visibility. Social media allows gay individuals to share their personal stories and experiences directly with a global audience(Bantugan et al., 2017). Platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook enable users to post personal updates, photos, and videos that humanize their experiences as gay individuals. By sharing their journeys of self-discovery, coming out, and navigating relationships, these personal narratives help to dismantle stereotypes and misconceptions about LGBTQ+ people (Marwick & Boyd, 2011).

Countering Stigma and Discrimination. Social media provides a platform for LGBTQ+ advocacy and activism. Through hashtags, campaigns, and viral content, activists and organizations raise awareness about issues (Bantugan, 2022) such as discrimination, violence, and legal inequalities faced by gay individuals. This mobilizes public support, educates followers, and challenges discriminatory attitudes, thereby fostering empathy and solidarity (Marwick & Boyd, 2011).

Building Supportive Communities. Online communities and groups on platforms like Reddit and Tumblr provide safe spaces for gay individuals to connect with others who share similar experiences. These communities offer support, advice, and encouragement, particularly for those who may feel isolated or marginalized in their offline environments. The sense of belonging and validation gained through these online interactions can significantly impact an individual's well-being and resilience (Lombardi et al., 2002; Bantugan, 2023).

Educating and Challenging Norms. Social media facilitates the dissemination of educational content about LGBTQ+ issues, terminology, history, and rights. Creators and organizations produce videos, infographics, and articles that explain complex concepts in accessible ways, helping to educate followers and challenge heteronormative assumptions. This educational outreach fosters understanding and encourages critical reflection on societal norms and biases (Tziallas, 2020).

Empathy Through Shared Experiences. By exposing users to diverse perspectives and lived experiences, social media cultivates empathy among its audience(Bantugan et al., 2017). Viewing posts, videos, and stories shared by gay individuals allows users to empathize with their joys, struggles, and aspirations. This emotional connection encourages users to see beyond stereotypes and recognize the common humanity shared with LGBTQ+ individuals (Lombardi et al., 2002).

Influencing Cultural Attitudes and Policies. Social media campaigns and movements have been instrumental in influencing cultural attitudes towards LGBTQ+ rights and policies (Bantugan, 2023). For instance, viral campaigns like #LoveWins and #PrideMonth have mobilized public support for marriage equality and other LGBTQ+ rights initiatives globally. The visibility and support generated through these campaigns have pressured policymakers to enact more inclusive laws and policies (Tziallas, 2020).

Hence, social media serves as a powerful tool for shaping public opinion and building a culture of empathy towards gay individuals. By amplifying personal narratives, countering stigma, building communities, educating audiences, fostering empathy through shared experiences, and influencing cultural attitudes and policies, social media platforms play a pivotal role in advancing LGBTQ+ rights and promoting a more inclusive society.

YouTube and Gay Loneliness

YouTube has had a multifaceted impact on the experiences of gay individuals, and its role in alleviating or intensifying gay loneliness depends largely on how it is utilized and experienced by users. Here are some perspectives on its influence:

Alleviating Gay Loneliness. YouTube has provided a platform for gay individuals to connect, share their stories, and find community. Channels focused on LGBTQ+ topics, coming out stories, and personal vlogs create spaces where viewers can relate to others facing similar challenges. This visibility and sense of community can reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness by fostering a sense of belonging and validation (Tziallas, 2020; Bantugan et al., 2017).

Shaping a New Form of Loneliness. While YouTube offers connections and community, it can also contribute to a different form of loneliness. Some individuals may experience a sense of inadequacy or loneliness when comparing their lives to the seemingly perfect or curated content often found on the platform. The pressure to present a certain image or achieve popularity online can create feelings of isolation if real-life experiences don't measure up to the online personas presented (Marwick & Boyd, 2011).

Intensifying Loneliness. For some gay individuals, particularly those in less accepting environments, YouTube may inadvertently intensify feelings of loneliness. Consuming content that highlights experiences and freedoms not accessible in their own lives can exacerbate feelings of longing or alienation. Additionally, cyberbullying and negative comments on LGBTQ+ content can reinforce feelings of isolation and vulnerability (Lombardi et al., 2002).

Role of Online vs. Offline Interactions. While YouTube and other social media platforms facilitate online connections, they may not always translate into meaningful offline relationships. This disparity can lead to a sense of disconnection between the digital world of social media and the real-world interactions that are essential for combating loneliness (Marwick & Boyd, 2011).

Thus, YouTube's impact on gay loneliness varies depending on individual experiences and contexts. While it provides opportunities for visibility, community-building, and support, it also presents challenges related to comparison, authenticity, and online vs. offline interactions. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for harnessing the potential of social media platforms like YouTube to positively influence the well-being of gay individuals.

Understanding Gay Loneliness in YouTube through Phenomenology and Online Data Mining

Research investigating gay loneliness in the context of digital phenomenology and data mining is relatively nascent but increasingly relevant in understanding how digital spaces shape and reflect the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals. Here's an overview of the landscape:

Digital Phenomenology and Gay Loneliness. Digital phenomenology examines how individuals experience and make sense of their lives through digital interactions. For gay individuals, digital platforms like social media, dating apps, and online communities provide spaces for identity exploration, connection with others, and expression of marginalized identities. Research in this area often explores how these digital spaces influence perceptions of loneliness, community belonging, and social support among gay individuals (McDermott et al., 2018).

Data Mining and Social Media Insights. Data mining techniques are increasingly used to analyze large datasets from social media platforms to uncover patterns and trends in behavior, sentiment, and interactions among different user groups, including LGBTQ+ communities. This approach allows researchers to examine how gay individuals navigate online spaces, interact with others, and seek support or validation. Studies may analyze language use, sentiment analysis of posts, network structures, and engagement patterns to understand the dynamics of loneliness and community formation (Brubaker et al., 2019).

Methodological Challenges and Considerations. Research in this field faces several methodological challenges, including issues of data privacy, ethical concerns related to consent and anonymity, and the representativeness of online samples. Ensuring that findings accurately reflect diverse experiences within the LGBTQ+ community, including intersectional identities, is crucial for meaningful insights (Garcia & Sampaio, 2020).

Insights and Future Directions. Studies utilizing digital phenomenology and data mining have provided valuable insights into the dynamics of gay loneliness, shedding light on how digital interactions impact mental health and well-being. Future research could explore longitudinal studies to track changes over time, comparative analyses across different digital platforms, and interventions that leverage digital spaces to reduce loneliness and foster resilience among gay individuals.

Therefore, research at the intersection of gay loneliness, digital phenomenology, and data mining offers a promising avenue for understanding the complexities of social interaction, identity formation, and support-seeking behaviors in digital environments. Continued interdisciplinary efforts are essential for advancing knowledge in this field and informing interventions that promote positive outcomes for LGBTQ+ individuals.

Heideggerian Phenomenology and Gay Loneliness

Heideggerian phenomenology offers a valuable lens through which to study gay loneliness in the context of YouTube and digital spaces. Here are several key points highlighting its importance:

Understanding Lived Experience. Heideggerian phenomenology emphasizes understanding human existence through lived experience, focusing on how individuals navigate and make sense of their world. For gay individuals engaging with YouTube, their experiences of loneliness, community, and identity are deeply personal and shaped by digital interactions. Heideggerian analysis allows researchers to delve into these subjective experiences, uncovering the nuanced ways in which digital platforms influence perceptions of loneliness and connection.

Exploration of Authenticity. Heideggerian philosophy emphasizes authenticity and being true to oneself. In the context of YouTube, gay individuals often use the platform to express their authentic identities, share personal narratives, and connect with others who share similar experiences. This exploration of authenticity on YouTube can both alleviate and intensify feelings of loneliness, depending on the individual's ability to find meaningful connections and acceptance within digital communities.

Temporality and Digital Presence. Heideggerian phenomenology also considers the concept of temporality, or how individuals experience time and existence. In the digital age, YouTube allows for the creation of digital identities that exist beyond traditional temporal boundaries. Gay individuals may find solace in creating content that reflects their ongoing journey towards self-acceptance and connection, bridging temporal gaps and fostering a sense of continuity in their narratives of loneliness and resilience.

Mediated Being-in-the-World. Heidegger's concept of "being-in-the-world" acknowledges how individuals interact with their environment and other beings. YouTube serves as a mediated space where gay individuals negotiate their identities, seek validation, and forge connections. This mediation can amplify the visibility of gay experiences, challenge societal norms, and contribute to building a culture of empathy and understanding.

Ethical Considerations. Applying Heideggerian phenomenology to the study of gay loneliness on YouTube underscores the importance of ethical considerations. Researchers must navigate issues of consent, privacy, and authenticity in digital research, ensuring that their analyses respect the lived experiences and vulnerabilities of LGBTQ+ individuals.

In essence, Heideggerian phenomenology provides a robust framework for exploring the complexities of gay loneliness in the digital age, particularly within platforms like YouTube. By focusing on lived experiences, authenticity, temporality, and mediated interactions, researchers can gain deeper insights into how digital spaces shape and reflect the emotional landscapes of LGBTQ+ individuals, contributing to more empathetic understandings and potentially informing supportive interventions.

Statement of the Problem

This study investigated the phenomenon of loneliness as experienced and presented by four selected adult male YouTubers in single videos less than 10 minutes long. This was done to reveal how gay loneliness is presented and privileged in YouTube and find congruences with the loneliness associated with gay males before and after the mainstreaming of social media,particularly, YouTube.

II.   Methodology

This study utilized the research approach of Bantugan (2024), particularly the fusion of phenomenology, multiple case study, and data mining. The four subjects selected were found through a YouTube search using "gay" and "lonely" as search keywords after finding the first video accidentally in the website. Videos that were less than 10 minutes were found to be the most common in the category and for purposes of choosing comparable cases, videos that were not far off from each other in terms of video length were the most suitable for pair comparison (one or more were not too long or too short to result in undue misrepresentation). The first video (running eight minutes), with 5,000 likes as of July 13, 2024 and owned by a white male YouTuber with 90,300 subscribers, was viewed 123,343 times since July 4, 2024. The second video (running almost seven minutes), with 993 likes as of the same date and owned by white male YouTuber with 33,100 subscribers, was viewed 21,622 times since December 18, 2023. The third video (running almost nine minutes), with 109 likes and owned by while male YouTuber with 1,220 subscribers, was viewed 2,089 times since January 10, 2024. The last video (running five minutes), with 11,000 likes and owned by a white male YouTuber with 27,200

subscribers, was viewed 217,499 times since December 21, 2023. The main method for gathering relevant information was textual analysis, the text being the verbal information in YouTube videos self-produced by the participants for their respective viewers. Their online identities are not revealed in this paper to maintain their privacy even if their videos were open to the public. By virtue of the public nature of their content, their consent was not sought; however, anonymity was ensured so that it will be difficult for other ill-intentioned parties to seek them out as a result of their inclusion in this paper. All the videos were transcribed using a free online video transcriber application (kome.ai). The transcripts were read at least three times and coded for thematic analysis. Data were interpreted and made more meaningful through the lens of Heideggerian phenomenology. Singular "their/them" pronouns were used in the writing of this paper when referring to any of them since the researcher has no idea about their preferred pronouns when they are written about.

III.   Results

Lived Experiences of Loneliness

Participant 1. The speaker reflected on their childhood, where they felt a persistent loneliness despite being social and athletic, always feeling "on the outside looking in." They had many surface-level friendships but very few close connections, a situation worsened by being a closeted gay individual. Coming out as gay was a turning point that eased some of their darkness, but did not completely eradicate their loneliness. This persistent loneliness, even in supportive environments, underscores a deeper, intrinsic feeling that is not easily alleviated by external factors. Over time, the speaker learned to appreciate solitude for self-discovery and reflection, shifting their perspective to use loneliness to their advantage. They emphasized self-reliance and self-acceptance, advising others to listen to their own thoughts and find contentment within. Engaging in activities alone has become liberating, and they now view loneliness positively as a natural signal of longing for connection. Nature has provided them with a sense of belonging and peace, reinforcing that they are "never truly lonely." They offer reassurance to others feeling lonely, emphasizing the importance of self-compassion and finding comfort within oneself, transforming loneliness into a tool for self-discovery and fulfillment.

Participants 2. The speaker opens with a dramatic plea, "If you see me on the streets don't look at me please look away," setting a somber tone as they reflect on their disillusionment with the gay community after 10 years. They lamented the lack of genuine connection, describing interactions as purely physical with "zero connection," leading to loneliness and likening it to an addiction. This disillusionment caused them to lose interest in dating and intimacy due to repeated disappointments. The speaker highlighted issues with married or closeted men, who often create rushed and secretive encounters, further diminishing genuine connection. They described the anxiety and secrecy involved in interactions with closeted individuals, leading to a pervasive sense of loneliness among gay men who are often "hiding, rushing, discreet, in the closet." The speaker believes this disconnection drives many toward addiction and aligns with their personal choice to become an artist, embracing the inherent loneliness of the profession. Despite their critique, they hope for change by speaking openly about their experiences, aiming to spark a conversation to improve connections within the community. They remain hopeful, closing with, "I'll see you soon hopefully married... it's my glass of wine. Bye," painting a picture of someone grappling with the challenges of finding meaningful connections and advocating for a more open and connected future through their art and candid expression.

Participant 3. The speaker began with a humorous anecdote about feeling comfortable at an oil change shop run by a lesbian woman, a stark contrast to their usual encounters with straight men. This sets the stage for deeper reflections on happiness, loneliness, and self-care. They asserted that happiness requires active effort and conscious decision-making: "Happiness is not just something that like happens to you... you have to really choose to be happy." They candidly discuss combating feelings of sadness and loneliness by engaging in activities, such as making YouTube videos, to avoid worsening their mood: "If you feel weird, then go get in

your car. Don't be sad. Don't… mope." Despite their struggles, they highlighted the importance of doing something proactive to prevent sinking deeper into despair. The speaker expressed newfound comfort in solitude, valuing their own well-being over futile relationships: "Why… am I going to put more energy into somebody else than somebody's putting into me?" This shift is illustrated by their indifference to a recent rejection: "I genuinely don't give a [__]... I don't need you in my life." They found solace in creating YouTube videos, which serve as a means to connect and help others: "That would make me feel so good if I (were) able to help somebody feel better for a day." Overall, their narrative is a raw exploration of their journey toward self-acceptance, emphasizing the active choice of happiness, the importance of self-care, and the ongoing challenges of mental health and loneliness.

Participant 4. The speaker delved into the unique challenges faced by queer men, starting from early childhood when societal disapproval of their differences was first felt through comments like, "He's a boy, why is he always playing with the girls?" As they grew older, these negative comments escalated to overtly homophobic statements, leading to internalized harm and isolation, especially in unsupportive environments. They argued that the impact of discrimination on one queer individual affects the entire community: "One of us getting hate-crimed on the other side of the world is all of us' problem," emphasizing the importance of solidarity. They discussed how depression and loneliness can drive queer individuals to seek external validation, resulting in insincere connections and exhausting people-pleasing behaviors. This heightened need for vigilance to avoid harmful relationships contributes to the keen ability of many gay people to "read" others, which is crucial for their safety. Despite the inherent loneliness, the speaker viewed the queer experience as a journey of personal growth, valuing authentic companionship over superficial relationships: "I hate (one) who steals my solitude without an exchange offering me true company." They concluded on a hopeful note, reflecting on how embracing their true self online led to genuine friendships and a more fulfilling social life, expressing gratitude to their audience and offering a message of solidarity, resilience, and hope.

Recurring Themes across Different Lived Experiences of Loneliness

Loneliness and Isolation. The recurring themes across the four transcripts reveal a profound sense of loneliness and isolation. Each speaker expressed feelings of being alone and disconnected. For instance, one speaker emphasized their emptiness in superficial relationships by saying, "to me that's lonely to me that's just an addiction to me that's not fun." Another speaker, struggling with isolation, revealed, "I don't know how to fix what's wrong with my brain... sitting around in my bed all day it's just going to make me feel… worse."

The recurring themes of loneliness and isolation in the transcripts highlight the psychological and social challenges of online socialization. While digital platforms facilitate broad networks, they often lack the depth needed for meaningful connections, leading to dissatisfaction and amplified loneliness (Turkle, 2015). Isolation, as described by a speaker's struggle with inactivity and mental distress, aligns with findings that excessive online engagement can exacerbate depression and feelings of inadequacy (Keles et al., 2020). Although social media can provide support networks, its superficial interactions and curated portrayals often deepen emotional disconnection. Addressing these issues requires balancing online interactions with authentic, in-person relationships to mitigate the adverse effects of digital socialization.

Societal Rejection and Discrimination. These experiences of loneliness are compounded by societal rejection and discrimination. The direct impact of societal attitudes on self-esteem and mental health is captured in comments like, "being gay is a sin you're going to hell," which illustrate the harsh judgment faced by individuals.This kind of societal judgment highlights the stigma and marginalization faced by individuals, particularly those from minority groups, which significantly impacts self-esteem, mental health, and their ability to engage meaningfully in online socialization.

Negative societal attitudes significantly impact the mental health of marginalized individuals, fostering feelings of worthlessness, shame, and isolation (Meyer, 2003). Online platforms, while offering opportunities for connection and community-building, also expose users to cyberbullying and discriminatory language, which often mirror offline prejudice and exacerbate loneliness (Craig et al., 2020; Savin-Williams, 2001). However, affirming online communities, such as LGBTQ+ forums, can counteract these negative effects by providing a sense of belonging and buffering against stress, as highlighted by social support theory (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Craig et al., 2015). This dual reality underscores the need for inclusive digital spaces to mitigate harm and promote resilience.

Inauthentic Relationships and Superficial Connections. The prevalence of inauthentic relationships and superficial connections is another significant theme. Individuals often act in certain ways to gain acceptance, which hinders the formation of genuine bonds. One speaker explained, "you start acting overly nice developing people-pleasing traits." Such behaviors align with Goffman's (1959) concept of "impression management," where individuals perform curated versions of themselves to fit perceived social standards, which may undermine authenticity and lead to feelings of disconnection.The lament, "no friendship no chemistry no emotion you know zero you feel nothing," underscores the difficulty in establishing meaningful online connections. Turkle (2015) argues that digital communication often lacks the depth and emotional resonance of face-to-face interaction, as online platforms prioritize quantity of connections over quality. This results in relationships that feel superficial, leaving individuals with unmet emotional needs and reinforcing feelings of loneliness.Additionally, the tendency to prioritize social acceptance over genuine interaction can perpetuate cycles of self-doubt and dissatisfaction. According to Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory, authentic relationships fulfill intrinsic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Superficial interactions fail to satisfy these needs, contributing to emotional exhaustion and diminishing the overall quality of socialization (Lynch et al., 2005).

Proactively improving mental health by engaging in positive behaviors, as in "this is me choosing to be happy every day... choosing to do things that make me feel better," highlights the role of agency in navigating emotional challenges. Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory underscores that intentional actions to improve well-being can lead to greater satisfaction and resilience, both online and offline. Online spaces often provide resources, communities, and platforms for these self-improvement efforts, supporting users' mental health journeys.Furthermore, embracing one's identity, as seen in "after I started posting gay stuff and thirst traps... some potentially homophobic people in my life distanced themselves from me," underscores the transformative role of authenticity in online socialization. By expressing their true selves, individuals can attract supportive networks while filtering out negative influences. This supports the findings of Craig et al. (2015), which highlight that affirming online communities can serve as safe spaces for identity exploration and validation.

Seeking Validation and External Approval. Seeking validation and external approval significantly influence online socialization, shaping how individuals interact and present themselves in digital spaces. The comment, "addicted to the physical part and that's it... you get it done and that's it," reveals the pursuit of superficial validation through transient physical relationships. This aligns with Baumeister and Leary's (1995) "need to belong" theory, which suggests that individuals strive for acceptance, even in relationships lacking depth, to fulfill an innate desire for social connection. In online contexts, this often manifests in behaviors like excessive self-presentation or reliance on surface-level interactions to feel valued.The struggle with external validation is further highlighted in the statement, "sitting around in my bed all day... it's just going to make me feel… worse." This illustrates the psychological toll of relying on others' approval to derive self-worth, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy and disconnection when those needs are unmet. Higgins' (1987) self-discrepancy theory supports this, explaining how the gap between one's ideal self and perceived social

expectations can exacerbate negative emotions, particularly in online environments where comparisons are prevalent.

Moreover, the remark, *"*most of us go into hiding who we truly are to dodge discrimination and judgment*,"* underscores the compromises individuals make to seek societal acceptance. Goffman's (1959) concept of impression management is particularly relevant here, as individuals curate their online personas to avoid criticism and judgment, often at the expense of authenticity. This dynamic may provide temporary acceptance but can ultimately reinforce feelings of isolation and a lack of genuine connection.

Authenticity and Self-Acceptance. Authenticity and self-acceptance emerge as vital themes in shaping fulfilling and meaningful online social interactions. By choosing to live authentically, as illustrated in the statement, "Enough, it's time for me to find some queer fans by being my gay authentic self online,"individuals actively seek to align their online personas with their true identities. This supports the findings of Craig et al. (2015), who argue that affirming online communities can provide a sense of belonging, especially for marginalized individuals. Such environments enable users to foster deeper connections rooted in mutual understanding and shared experiences.The commitment to authenticity and self-acceptance is further reflected in "this is me choosing to be happy every day," which highlights the role of intentionality in navigating digital spaces. Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory posits that fulfilling the need for autonomy and self-expression promotes well-being. In online settings, this can translate to users actively curating their digital experiences to reflect their intrinsic values rather than external pressures.

Lastly, the sentiment, "embracing the loneliness rather than fighting it by pushing myself to be more likable," underscores the transformative power of self-acceptance. Instead of conforming to societal expectations, individuals who accept their own vulnerabilities and preferences can experience greater psychological resilience. According to Brown (2012), embracing vulnerability fosters genuine connections, as it shifts the focus from performative approval to meaningful interaction, even in online socialization.

Community and Solidarity. Community and solidarity are fundamental to meaningful online socialization, particularly for marginalized groups seeking connection and mutual support. The statement, "I am part of the gay community and I've been in it for like 10 years," underscores the role of online spaces in fostering identity affirmation and long-term belonging. According to McMillan and Chavis (1986), a sense of community involves membership, influence, integration, and shared emotional connection. Online platforms extend this dynamic by enabling geographically dispersed individuals to cultivate collective identities and shared experiences.

The desire for solidarity, as expressed in "let's cheer each other up," highlights the supportive function of digital communities in mitigating loneliness and promoting emotional well-being. Social support theory (Cohen & Wills, 1985) suggests that networks offering emotional, informational, and instrumental support can buffer against stress and foster resilience. In digital environments, such solidarity often manifests through shared encouragement, validation, and the normalization of personal challenges, reinforcing the community's protective role.

The shared responsibility articulated in "one of us getting hate-crimed on the other side of the world is all of us' problem"reflects a collective identity that transcends individual experiences. This aligns with Anderson's (1983) concept of "imagined communities," where members feel connected despite never meeting in person. For online socialization, this sense of global interconnectedness fosters activism and communal resilience, as individuals rally together in response to shared challenges, such as discrimination or systemic injustice.

Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being. Mental health and emotional well-being are critical factors influencing online socialization, particularly as societal pressures and negative experiences in digital spaces exacerbate psychological challenges. The statement, "I haven't been on a date in a long time... because I've lost interest," reflects the emotional toll of societal expectations on personal fulfillment and social engagement. This aligns with findings by Twenge et al. (2017), who emphasize that increased exposure to digital environments without meaningful interaction can diminish interest in offline relationships and contribute to emotional withdrawal.

The struggle with mental health, as described in "I don't know how to fix what's wrong with my brain... sitting around in my bed all day it's just going to make me feel... worse," highlights how online spaces can sometimes reinforce feelings of helplessness. Prolonged engagement in passive digital consumption has been linked to increased symptoms of depression and anxiety, as shown by studies like those of Primack et al. (2017). When individuals lack positive reinforcement or support in online environments, these feelings may intensify, creating a cycle of disengagement and worsening mental health.The statement, "constant exposure to negative comments can create a form of conditioning," underscores how digital interactions can negatively influence emotional well-being through repeated exposure to harmful societal attitudes. Cyberbullying and online harassment can lead to emotional desensitization or heightened psychological distress (Kowalski et al., 2014). This highlights the need for interventions to create safer online spaces that reduce the prevalence of negative conditioning and promote mental health.

Overcoming Societal Expectations. Overcoming societal expectations shapes online socialization by influencing how individuals navigate digital spaces to prioritize personal happiness and authenticity. The statement, "I don't want to waste my time with these types of guys," reflects a rejection of societal norms that pressure individuals into conforming to certain relationship standards. This aligns with Goffman's (1959) concept of the "presentation of self," where individuals consciously manage their social interactions to resist external expectations and create a sense of control over their identity. Online platforms provide a space where such boundaries can be set, as users curate their experiences to align with their values.

Similarly, the statement, "I'm doing something on the side that takes up some of my time and makes me feel happy," highlights the role of digital environments in facilitating activities that enhance well-being and foster self-discovery. According to Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory, engaging in intrinsically motivated activities—those pursued for personal satisfaction rather than external validation—promotes psychological health. Online socialization often allows individuals to explore such pursuits, whether through hobbies, creative expression, or community involvement, thereby providing an avenue to resist societal pressures and focus on individual fulfillment.

Despite these opportunities, societal expectations can still infiltrate online spaces, creating challenges for users striving for authenticity. Research by Bargh et al. (2002) highlights that while digital environments enable self-expression, they can also perpetuate social norms and stereotypes, requiring individuals to navigate a complex landscape of expectations versus personal autonomy."

Collectively, these themes highlight the complex interplay between individual experiences and broader societal influences. They underscore the challenges and triumphs of navigating identity, relationships, and mental health in a world that often demands conformity. Through their stories, the speakers reveal a journey of resilience, self-discovery, and the pursuit of genuine connections amidst the backdrop of societal rejection and the quest for authenticity.

Being Gay and Lonely Male YouTubers

The intersection between loneliness and being gay is deeply intertwined with the societal and personal challenges that many LGBTQ+ individuals face. Across the transcripts, the speakers highlight poignant experiences that illustrate how being gay can lead to profound feelings of isolation.

One significant factor contributing to loneliness among gay individuals is societal stigma and discrimination. From a young age, many LGBTQ+ people encounter negative attitudes and rejection, both explicit and implicit, from their families, peers, and broader communities. This early exposure to prejudice can deeply impact self-esteem and mental health. As one speaker reflects, "People usually don't view different as good when it hints to someone being gay," indicating the initial stages of feeling different and unaccepted.

Moreover, the lack of social acceptance and understanding can lead to social isolation. LGBTQ+ youth and adults may struggle to find supportive communities where they feel safe and affirmed. This isolation is compounded by the fear of rejection or violence, which forces many individuals to conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity. One speaker expresses this dilemma, stating, "most of us go into hiding who we truly are to dodge discrimination and judgment," reflecting the pervasive need to protect oneself from harm.

The search for genuine connections can also be challenging within the LGBTQ+ community itself. While solidarity and support are crucial, internalized homophobia and unrealistic expectations can create barriers to forming meaningful relationships. Some individuals may experience superficial connections or even encounter judgment from within their own community, as noted by a speaker who mentions, "not only we get hate from the homophobes but also from some of the people inside our own community."

Personal experiences of rejection or failed relationships can exacerbate feelings of loneliness. The emotional toll of navigating societal pressures, coupled with the complexities of dating and relationships, can lead to disillusionment and withdrawal. As one speaker poignantly describes, "I've been disappointed so many times I just lost interest," illustrating the emotional exhaustion that can result from repeated setbacks in seeking meaningful connections.

Despite these challenges, the speakers also highlight resilience and personal growth. Many LGBTQ+ individuals undergo a journey of self-discovery and acceptance, ultimately finding strength in their identity. This process often involves seeking out supportive communities or online spaces where they can express themselves authentically. For some, embracing their true selves and finding acceptance within themselves becomes a source of empowerment and resilience against loneliness.

IV.   Discussion

Lived Experiences on Loneliness Privileged by Gay YouTubers

The intersection between loneliness and being gay underscores the complex interplay of societal rejection, internal struggles, and the quest for authentic connections. While the experiences shared in the transcripts reflect the harsh realities many LGBTQ+ individuals face, they also reveal a path towards self-acceptance, community solidarity, and personal growth. Addressing systemic discrimination and fostering inclusive environments are crucial steps towards reducing loneliness and supporting the well-being of LGBTQ+ individuals worldwide.

In essence, the experiences privileged by gay YouTubers on the platform reflect a diverse range of personal journeys and societal challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community. Through their content, these creators not only document their individual stories but also contribute to a broader cultural conversation about identity, acceptance, and resilience in the face of adversity.

Loneliness of Gay Males On- and Off-YouTube

The loneliness experienced by gay males in the transcripts aligns with broader findings on gay loneliness in several significant ways. Research consistently indicates that gay men often face unique challenges that contribute to feelings of isolation and loneliness, despite progress in societal acceptance and legal rights.

Social Stigma and Discrimination. The transcripts reflect experiences where societal stigma and discrimination contribute significantly to loneliness. Research, such as studies by Herek (2009), underscores that experiences of discrimination, whether overt or subtle, can lead to heightened feelings of loneliness among gay individuals. This aligns with the transcripts' portrayal of individuals feeling isolated due to societal disapproval or the need to hide their true selves to avoid judgment.

Relationship Struggles. Many gay males in the transcripts express difficulties in forming and maintaining meaningful relationships, which is a common theme in research on gay loneliness. Feinstein, Goldfried, and Davila (2012) discuss how experiences of rejection and struggles with intimacy contribute to loneliness among gay men. This resonates with the transcripts' depiction of transactional or superficial relationships that fail to fulfill deeper emotional needs.

Internalized Homophobia and Mental Health: The transcripts hint at internal conflicts and mental health struggles, which research links to higher levels of loneliness among gay men. Frost and Meyer (2009) highlight that internalized homophobia, where individuals internalize societal stigma and reject their own sexual identity, can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and isolation. This mirrors the transcripts' portrayal of individuals grappling with self-acceptance and the impact of societal attitudes on their mental well-being.

Community and Support Networks: Despite challenges, the transcripts also emphasize the importance of community and solidarity among gay individuals. Research indicates that supportive social networks and community involvement can mitigate feelings of loneliness and promote well-being (Frost & Meyer, 2009). This aligns with the transcripts' recognition of the value of finding supportive peers and online communities as a source of connection and validation.

In summary, the experiences depicted in the transcripts closely reflect findings in research on gay loneliness. They highlight the pervasive impact of societal stigma, challenges in forming intimate relationships, struggles with internalized homophobia, and the role of supportive communities in mitigating loneliness. These parallels underscore the complex interplay of social, psychological, and interpersonal factors that contribute to the loneliness experienced by many gay men.

Heideggerian Authenticity and Gay Loneliness Presented in YouTube

Heidegger's concept of authenticity provides a poignant framework for understanding gay loneliness as depicted in the transcripts. It illuminates the complexities of navigating societal expectations, existential anxiety, and the quest for genuine connection within digital and physical realms. By embracing authenticity, individuals in the transcripts strive to transcend loneliness and forge meaningful identities and relationships, embodying Heidegger's call to live authentically amidst the challenges of modern existence.

Authenticity in Self-Expression. Heideggerian authenticity encourages individuals to express their true selves without conforming to societal norms or expectations. In the transcripts, gay individuals often grapple with feelings of loneliness stemming from societal pressures and the need to hide their identities. For instance, one speaker mentioned how embracing their authentic gay identity online helped them find genuine connections. This aligns with Heidegger's notion that authenticity involves owning one's identity and finding spaces where one can express it freely, even amidst societal pressures.

Existential Anxiety and Loneliness. Heidegger acknowledges existential anxiety as a fundamental aspect of human existence, particularly when individuals face the possibility of social rejection or lack of acceptance. This existential anxiety is palpable in the transcripts, where speakers recounted experiences of feeling isolated and disconnected due to societal prejudices against being gay. Despite efforts to seek validation through digital platforms like YouTube, there remains an underlying sense of loneliness rooted in the existential struggle for acceptance and belonging.

Temporality and Projection. Heideggerian temporality suggests that individuals project themselves into the future while grappling with their past, shaping their present experiences. In the context of gay loneliness in the transcripts, individuals project their authentic selves into digital spaces as a means of navigating their loneliness and seeking connection. This projection into the future, where acceptance and community might be found, illustrates a striving toward authenticity despite the challenges presented by societal stigma.

Mediated Being and Inauthenticity. Heidegger discusses how technology mediates our interactions with the world, potentially distancing us from authentic experiences. In the case of the transcripts, while YouTube and social media offer platforms for authentic self-expression, they also pose risks of inauthentic connections and shallow validations. Speakers in the transcripts often highlight the superficial nature of some digital interactions, where physical desire or transactional relationships overshadow genuine emotional connections, thus complicating the quest for authenticity and exacerbating feelings of loneliness.

Resilience and Self-Acceptance. Heideggerian authenticity also emphasizes resilience and the continual pursuit of self-acceptance despite external pressures. Speakers in the transcripts demonstrate resilience by navigating their loneliness through creative outlets, community engagement, and self-affirmation. This journey towards self-acceptance, although challenging, aligns with Heidegger's notion that authenticity involves an ongoing process of self-discovery and affirmation, even in the face of societal marginalization.

Heideggerian Temporality and Gay Loneliness Presented in YouTube

Heidegger's temporality offers a nuanced framework for understanding how gay individuals in the transcripts navigate loneliness across time. It reveals the interplay between past experiences, present struggles, and future aspirations, highlighting the complex temporal dimensions of their existential and emotional journeys in the context of societal marginalization and digital engagement.

Past and Present in Authenticity. Heidegger suggests that individuals are shaped by their past experiences and project themselves into the future. In the context of gay loneliness in the transcripts, individuals often reflect on past experiences of marginalization, societal rejection, or internalized shame. These past experiences influence their present feelings of loneliness and their approach to seeking connection. For example, some speakers recounted childhood experiences of feeling different or being ostracized, which continue to resonate in their present-day struggles with loneliness. This temporal continuity underscores how past traumas and societal attitudes persistently impact their current emotional states.

Projection and Future Possibilities. Heideggerian temporality also emphasizes projection into the future, where individuals anticipate possibilities and strive towards certain outcomes. In the transcripts, gay

individuals project themselves into imagined futures where they might find acceptance, genuine connection, or a sense of belonging. This projection is evident in their use of digital platforms like YouTube to express their authentic selves, hoping to attract like-minded individuals and build supportive communities. However, the uncertainty of these future possibilities, influenced by societal attitudes and personal histories, contributes to a sense of existential anxiety and ongoing loneliness.

Anxiety and Uncertainty. Heidegger acknowledges existential anxiety as individuals confront the uncertainties of their existence and their place in the world. For gay individuals in the transcripts, this anxiety is compounded by the uncertainty of acceptance and the fear of continued loneliness. The transcripts reveal how societal norms and discriminatory attitudes create existential angst, leading individuals to question their identities and struggle with feelings of isolation. The temporal dimension of Heideggerian thought thus illuminates how gay loneliness is not just a present-day emotion but a lived experience shaped by past traumas and future aspirations.

Temporality in Digital Spaces. Heidegger's concept of temporality also applies to digital spaces, where individuals navigate their identities and relationships over time. In the transcripts, speakers describe their digital presence as a space for temporal projection—where they can experiment with self-expression, seek validation, and envision future possibilities of acceptance and community. However, the mediated nature of digital interactions introduces complexities, as temporal projections can lead to both authentic connections and superficial validations, impacting their experiences of loneliness.

Resilience and Authentic Temporality. Despite the challenges posed by temporal dimensions of loneliness, Heideggerian thought underscores resilience through authentic temporal engagement. This involves embracing one's past, navigating present uncertainties with integrity, and projecting towards future possibilities grounded in self-acceptance and genuine connection. Speakers in the transcripts demonstrate this resilience by using digital platforms not just for escapism but as tools for temporal engagement—reflecting on their past, asserting their present identities, and envisioning futures where loneliness may be mitigated through authentic connections.

Heideggerian Mediated Interactions and Gay Loneliness Presented in YouTube

Heidegger's perspective on mediated interactions provides a framework for understanding how gay individuals in the transcripts navigate loneliness within digital environments. It underscores the complexities of authenticity, virtual presence, and existential engagement, prompting critical reflection on the role of technology in shaping human experiences of loneliness and connection in contemporary society.

Technology-Mediated Authenticity. Heidegger argues that modern technology, while often seen as a tool for connection, can also distance individuals from authentic experiences. In the context of gay loneliness presented in the transcripts, digital platforms like YouTube and social media serve as mediated spaces where individuals project their authentic selves. However, these interactions are mediated by the platform's constraints, societal norms, and audience expectations, potentially shaping how authenticity is perceived and experienced. For instance, speakers in the transcripts may present themselves authentically online to seek validation and connection, yet the mediated nature of these interactions can limit the depth of genuine emotional exchange.

Ambiguity of Mediation. Heidegger highlights that mediated interactions introduce an ambiguity where the authenticity of experiences may be compromised. In the transcripts, gay individuals navigate this ambiguity as they engage with digital spaces to alleviate loneliness. They may find temporary relief or validation through likes, comments, and virtual connections, yet these interactions remain mediated by screens and algorithms. This mediation can lead to a paradox where individuals seek genuine connection but may encounter superficial engagements that fail to address deeper existential loneliness.

Existential Authenticity vs. Virtual Presence. Heidegger distinguishes between existential authenticity—grounded in lived experiences and genuine relationships—and virtual presence mediated by technology. In the transcripts, speakers grapple with the tension between their authentic selves and the personas they project online. While digital platforms offer visibility and community, they also pose challenges to authenticity by encouraging curated identities and performative behaviors. This discrepancy between existential authenticity and virtual presence complicates the experience of gay loneliness, as individuals strive to reconcile their offline realities with their online personas.

Temporal and Spatial Dimensions. Heidegger's philosophy of mediated interactions also considers the temporal and spatial dimensions of human existence. In the context of gay loneliness, individuals navigate digital spaces that transcend physical boundaries, connecting with global communities and perspectives. This spatial expansion offers opportunities for solidarity and visibility but also introduces challenges of cultural differences and varying societal norms. Temporally, mediated interactions unfold in real-time yet lack the immediacy and intimacy of face-to-face encounters, influencing how individuals experience and perceive loneliness over time.

Towards Authentic Engagement. Despite the challenges posed by mediated interactions, Heidegger's philosophy encourages a reevaluation of technology's role in fostering authentic human connections. Speakers in the transcripts demonstrate resilience by leveraging digital platforms to share their narratives, advocate for visibility, and seek genuine connections. By critically engaging with mediated interactions, individuals can navigate gay loneliness with authenticity, mindfulness of technological limitations, and a commitment to fostering meaningful relationships beyond virtual spaces.

Gay Loneliness in the Age of YouTube

Understanding gay loneliness in the age of YouTube involves comparing it with experiences before the Internet, highlighting both continuities and transformations. In the pre-Internet era, gay individuals often faced profound isolation due to limited visibility and community. Finding and connecting with other gay people were challenging and often confined to specific physical spaces like bars or clubs in urban centers. The advent of YouTube and other online platforms has dramatically increased visibility and community building for gay individuals, offering a global stage for sharing personal stories, accessing resources, and forming virtual communities that transcend geographic boundaries. This visibility can help reduce isolation by fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity among gay individuals, empowering them to express their identities openly and authentically.

However, alongside these benefits come new challenges. While YouTube enhances visibility and community, it also introduces complexities such as navigating online harassment, maintaining authenticity in a curated digital space, and managing expectations from virtual interactions that may not fully address deep emotional needs. Despite connections made online, some individuals may still experience loneliness due to the gap between digital personas and real-life experiences. Nonetheless, the Internet, including YouTube, provides unprecedented access to information, support networks, and resources for gay individuals, potentially alleviating feelings of loneliness by offering knowledge, validation, and connection with others facing similar challenges. This evolution underscores a shifting landscape where digital platforms play a pivotal role in shaping the experiences of gay loneliness, influencing both personal well-being and societal attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals.

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