LGBTQ+ Content on TikTok and Everyday Activism

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Abstract

Due to the recent stay at home orders surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, young social media users have found a new creative, activistic and comedic outlet through the platform TikTok. The content shared on TikTok are short videos, any of which have the opportunity to become viral if it is shared with the right audiences. The virality is what makes TikTok unique and drives its users to constantly produce content. Just like on other social media platforms, many different minority groups have found their place and their people on TikTok where they share information, produce relevant jokes and communicate with each other. The LGBTQ+ community is among those groups and some content creators on the platform try to use TikTok's possible virality affordances to spread awareness, destigmatize LGBTQ+ people and educate others on sensitive or unknown topics surrounding gender and/or sexuality. This thesis aims to find how the video creators are motivated to share this type of LGBTQ+ content which could result in social impact, especially on a smaller scale known as everyday activism. Therefore, the main research question is: how are LGBTQ+ TikTok creators motivated to create everyday activism within their networked identity and beyond?

The theoretical basis for this thesis will come from three separate understandings. First, how TikTok and its affordances are situated within the general understanding of social media and the platform society. Second, the notion of everyday activism is explained. Third, the concepts of online, narrative and networked identity will be discussed and how these work together in this thesis. Methodologically, Fairclough's critical discourse analysis is used to first analyse the LGBTQ+, activistic, TikTok video content as well the affordances offered by the platform for the textual analysis. Secondly, to interview LGBTQ+ TikTok content creators for the discursive practice and third to combine these different analyses and come to an understanding of how these kinds of videos are situated within the social practice.

It was found that sharing stories of everyday smaller struggles by LGBTQ+ as well as bigger personal hardships and experiences of discrimination, in many different formats, did create moments of everyday activism in those who viewed and commented on the TikTok content. The TikTok users shared that posting those types of personal stories online and receiving positive, as well as negative feedback in some cases, helped in keeping them motivated to continue posting their LGBTQ+ life online.

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Introduction

It can be said that TikTok is currently one of the most popular social media platforms and has quickly risen in popularity, gaining much attention and a larger user base only in recent years (Sensor Tower, 2020). The app is used to make and share horizontal, creative videos that are a maximum of one minute long and TikTok is mainly used by young adults and teenagers. The content of these videos ranges widely, from small comedy sketches to educational discussions to dance or singing performances (TikTok, 2021). As TikTok's 'For You' page algorithm is developed in a way that anyone's video on the platform could be picked and suddenly seen by many users, several new influential young adults have risen in popularity, like Charli D'Amelio and Olivia Rodrigo. Some of these influential TikTok content creators choose to use their space on the platform to comment on social issues and injustices, like the Black Lives Matter Movement or climate change (Haenlein et al., 2020).

As with many other social media platforms, like Instagram, Twitter, and Tumblr, discussions of LGBTQ+ rights or issues and the people of the LGBTQ+ community have found a space on TikTok as well. LGBTQ+ users will use certain hashtags, captions, and audio clips to try and attract other members of the LGBTQ+ community to watch their videos (Simpson & Semaan, 2020). The LGBTQ+ side of TikTok, also known as 'GayTok' or 'QueerTok', contains a diverse range of content, just like the platform as a whole, with comedy, dancing, and information on social injustice and politics. The most influential content within this side of the platform is the discussions and videos that pertain to LGBTQ+ social issues and stories of personal challenges. By spreading these kinds of messages which, usually, are centred around creating positive change, LGBTQ+ video creators on TikTok are contributing, little by little, to everyday activism (Vivienne, 2011a). Content creators like Desmond Fambrini, Kelly Cadigan and Lex Horwitz are helping create this type of change.

Based on these phenomena, this thesis wants to investigate the motivations behind sharing personal video content in order to stimulate everyday activism within the LGBTQ+ content creators' community and to continue speaking about LGBTQ+ issues. The LGBTQ+ community has found ways to be heard and have established their influence using different social media platforms, like Instagram amongst others, and this thesis wants to research how

this can be seen on TikTok. Therefore, the research question is: how are LGBTQ+ TikTok creators motivated to create everyday activism within their networked identity and beyond?

To be able to answer this main research question the following sub-questions are formed: how have popular LGBTQ+ TikTok users used their platforms to increase awareness and destigmatize the LGBTQ+ narrative? And in what ways does the sharing of personal stories contribute to the self-representation of LGBTQ+ TikTok creators? The first sub-question will be answered by creating an understanding of how TikTok works as a platform and how this can create effects in society or certain communities. This will be examined through theoretical support from *The Platform Society* (Van Dijck, Poell & De Waal, 2018), specific research that has studied TikTok as a platform before (Anderson, 2020; Omar & Dequan, 2020; Vijay & Gekker, 2021), and by using platform affordance analysis as part of the method. The answer to the second sub-question will come from the interviews and the critical analysis of the LGBTQ+ TikTok content.

The subject of this research is to find out more about the intentions of the LGBTQ+ creators when producing and sharing their videos on TikTok and how this in turn results in everyday activism. The social media platform TikTok is not necessarily very new as it was known under different names like music.ly and Douyin before the algorithm and general use of the app was changed (Anderson, 2020; Tran, 2017). However, it has only recently risen in popularity, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, when most of the world was forced to stay at home and started using the platform for entertainment (Kale, 2020). Because of the recent popularity of TikTok, a few research projects have been carried out about this platform and social media network. For example, TikTok and its users have been featured in research about parasocial relationships with online public figures as well as their personal branding on these types of platforms (Ledbetter & Meisner, 2021). Weimann and Masri (2020) researched a very common topic surrounding social media networks; the spread of hate by extremist groups which in this case concerned far-right activism. Additionally, issues within Indian politics that suddenly became fuelled by TikTok users were researched through a lens of ludic engagement and the platform's features (Vijay & Gekker, 2021). This thesis will contribute to the relatively new library of TikTok research as well by specifically studying the LGBTQ+ community and their contribution to everyday activism.

It can't be said that LGBTQ+ matters online have not been researched before as there have been many works published around the LGBTQ+ community online and the treatment and representation of queer people on social media. There has been a wide array of articles about different kinds of important issues within the LGBTQ+ spaces which were formed in private chat rooms and on forums (Fraser, 2010; Maliepaard, 2017), on Tumblr during its popularity (Cavalcante, 2019; Ciszek, 2017; Oakley, 2016) and more recently on Instagram (Duguay, 2016; Duguay, 2019; Herrera, 2018). To add to this existing vault of research, this thesis will specifically analyse on how the LGBTQ+ community uses TikTok in a way that creates everyday activism and how the platform works with or against LGBTQ+ creators by performing an affordance analysis.

Regarding this thesis' social relevance, it can be said that LGBTQ+ issues and conversations are constantly developing and creating change in society. Therefore, researching these phenomena, especially concerning a new social media network, will hopefully show new potential for change in the LGBTQ+ community as well as for the TikTok platform.

The theoretical framework of this thesis will touch on and further explain three main concepts. First, as already mentioned before, to support one of the sub-questions, the notion of TikTok as a platform needs to be understood better, which will be approached through multiple sources to understand how platforms works as a whole (Van Dijck, Poell & De Waal, 2018) and the specifics of TikTok (Anderson, 2020; Omar & Dequan, 2020; Vijay & Gekker, 2021). Second, the idea of everyday activism will be explained and will relate this concept specifically to the activistic voices of minorities (Vivienne, 2011a). Third, it is key to understand how personal identities are formed, shaped and presented online, which is why the approach of networked identity work will be discussed (Vivienne & Burgess, 2012). The method used in this thesis will be critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2013), and will employ the supporting methods of affordance analysis and interviews, throughout the textual analysis, discursive practice and social practice. The textual analysis will include a small platform affordance analysis (Davis & Chouinard, 2017; Curinga, 2014) and a critical analysis of TikTok videos shared by LGBTQ+ content creators. The discursive practice will use interviews (Brennan, 2017; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019) to find out more about the TikTok

creators and how they understand and use the platform. The social practice will situate these findings within the broader social context of LGBTQ+ rights and activism.

The following thesis is split up into three chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter will further elaborate on the idea of everyday activism, the phenomenon of TikTok and the LGBTQ+ community's agenda on social media. Chapter two will feature this thesis' theoretical framework, which includes three important theoretical concepts, outlined above. Chapter three will start by explaining how critical discourse analysis will be used as the method of this thesis, including its multiple levels. Additionally, this chapter shares how the corpus was determined and how they then were collected, and it will share the findings and results from the critical discourse analysis. Lastly, the conclusion will summarize and discuss the main findings as well as touch on the implications of this thesis and a reflection.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Phenomenon

The following chapter will explain the phenomenon around TikTok as the new, popular social media platform, which will be further elaborated in the theoretical framework. Second, the term LGBTQ+ will be quickly clarified on what it means and how it is used in this thesis. Third, the representations of the LGBTQ+ community on social media will be discussed and specifically their presence on TikTok.

The Platform of TikTok

As TikTok and its affordances are the objects of study for this thesis, it is important to further understand its rise in popularity as a social media platform especially among teenagers and young adults. As mentioned above, TikTok has been around for a few years under other names, which were widely known and used by a few. However, after its rebranding from music.ly to TikTok, the app gained popularity among young adults and teenagers throughout 2019 (Tran, 2017). These generations of social media users decided that Instagram was old news, just like Facebook and Twitter had been rejected and moved away from years before. Therefore, TikTok with its video format and sound bite features slowly became more and more interesting to young adults and teenagers (Piper Sandler, 2020).

In 2020, the coronavirus pandemic hit the world and the majority of people were instructed to stay at home and to lessen social interactions or activities. Due to boredom and trying to find new ways to have social connections, more people started to join TikTok as they were trying to find a creative outlet or to see what others were doing during the lockdown period (Parivudhiphongs, 2020). TikTok's affordances are quite specific and unique, as there are essentially two content feeds where one shows the users videos from the accounts that they follow; their friends, celebrities and any other creators (TikTok, 2021). However, the other feed, better known as the "For You" page, does not only recommend videos that have the most views, likes or comments, it features videos from any creator no matter how large their following that fits the user's preferences which are determined by who or what they have watched, followed or interacted with before. This is how some TikTok video creators quickly managed to gain large followings, without having previous status as a social media star or a celebrity (Anderson, 2020; Kennedy, 2020). A further analysis of

TikTok, the "For You" page and other features of the platform will be discussed in chapter 3.3, where the affordance analysis is performed and explained.

The Meaning of LGBTQ+

It is important to clearly define the term LGBTQ+ as the following sections will combine this concept with TikTok, because it has become a platform where minorities discuss social issues. Throughout this thesis, the acronym LGBTQ+ is used repeatedly and this term encompasses all identifications of gender or sexuality that can be considered not strictly cisgender and heterosexual. LGBTQ+ includes the letters for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and the plus sign represents any other diverse gender or sexual identity not mentioned by the acronym. In some instances, the term "queer" will be used, most commonly when referring to research from other scholars, who use that term in their work.

The LGBTQ+ Community on Social Media

There have been multiple social media networks where members of the LGBTQ+ community have found how to use the platform to fit their needs or used it to their advantage to make LGBTQ+ voices heard (Carrasco & Kerne, 2018). This construction of LGBTQ+ spaces online is twofold as it can be seen through smaller, private or anonymous social networking sites specifically set up for and by the LGBTQ+ as well as public, well known social media platforms where LGBTQ+ users find, follow and interact with each other and their content (Fox & Ralston, 2016; Fraser, 2010). Previous research has shown that young LGBTQ+ individuals, who are usually still in the closet, value a safe, anonymous space online where they can meet others who are going through similar issues or triumphs as them (Fraser, 2010). Another important element to being part of an LGBTQ+ space online, usually via social media, is the ability to learn about certain aspects of the LGBTQ+ community and culture, especially during the coming out process (Fox & Ralston, 2016). Some LGBTQ+ individuals have shared that because they had received free information and answers when they needed it most "they understood the value of sharing their experiences and providing social feedback to others" (Fox & Ralston, 2016, p. 641). This is why sharing stories of personal challenge on social media as a member of the LGBTQ+ community can help other users and followers in many different ways.

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This LGBTQ+ side of social media can be found on TikTok, either through finding video content with related hashtags like #lgbtq and #queertok or through following newly popular, LGBTQ+ content creators (Lewis, 2019). The content of TikTok videos can range widely from comedy bites to sing or dance performances, however, there is a certain activistic side to the platform as well. Here LGBTQ+ users share stories about challenges in their personal life, concerning coming out, dating or discrimination (Haritaworn, 2020). The TikTok users create content speaking out about social issues, like equal rights for LGBTQ+ people, adoption issues and marriage laws (Haritaworn, 2020). This could also result in everyday activism, which will be further researched in this thesis. In this context, everyday activism can be understood as the act of sharing personal stories of a marginalized group, in this case LGBTQ+ people, in the online space of TikTok, as a catalyst for social change with the potential to challenge popular stereotypes (Vivienne & Burgess, 2012).

Following the trends from previous academic research regarding other social media platforms, it seems likely that followers of popular LGBTQ+ TikTok creators and consumers of their videos could become influenced by content surrounding LGBTQ+ rights and create their social change (Omar & Dequan, 2020; Vijay & Gekker, 2021; Vivienne, 2011b). Additionally, the stories of personal struggle shared by TikTok creators could also create a sense of positivity when answering insecure viewers' questions or the ability to see others like them on a popular platform like this (Fox & Ralston, 2016; Fraser, 2010). As TikTok is used by many young people and teenagers, the exposure to popular LGBTQ+ people with large followings could help in coming to terms with their gender or sexual identity. It is important to be cautious and critical when considering influential content creators as positive representations of a certain sexual or gender identity, because the public consumer of their content does not know what level of self-presentation they are sharing on the platform (Haenlein et al., 2020; Wang, 2020).

In short, it is important to consider the reach and effects of sharing content on TikTok. Especially, when this is related to personal issues or controversial topics as the young, teenaged users consuming this content could be influenced, positively or negatively by this. By letting their voices be heard, LGBTQ+ TikTok creators share personal anecdotes or activistic information on LGBTQ+ rights which could have effects similar to everyday activism. Or it could help insecure, in the closet, individuals to come out of their shell more

because they see that others have gone through similar struggles as them and they learn more about what it means to be part of the LGBTQ+ community. This phenomenon will be researched and analysed throughout the rest of this thesis.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

This chapter will focus on the theoretical framework of platform society and its affordances, everyday activism and online identity. Section 2.1 will feature multiple sources explaining TikTok as a platform and how its affordances fit into the platform society as a whole. Section 2.2 will discuss this thesis' focus on everyday activism online. Section 2.3 will discuss the ideas of networked, narrative and online identity.

2.1 Platform Society and Affordances

To answer the main research question, the following concepts and ideas need to be applied to the research; (1) the platform of TikTok specifically, (2) the broader notion of the platform society and (3) social media and its affordances.

The rise in popularity that TikTok has seen can be attributed to a growing trend in "social media of video creation and sharing, from short looping videos to live-streaming" (Anderson, 2020, p. 7). TikTok as a platform can be compared to both Instagram and, the now-discontinued app, Vine. Instagram and TikTok share similar affordances and interfaces, as they both allow the sharing of short, vertical videos, where users can interact by leaving comments or liking the content and the interface is seen as mobile-friendly (Omar & Dequan, 2020). However, the type of content and the different ways in which users find creative expression and experimentation on the platform is more similar to Vine (Anderson, 2020). "What makes the platform distinct is that replication and virality, or 'spreadability', are encoded as features of the platform; every TikTok video has the potential to spur the creation of another'' (Vijay & Gekker, 2021, p. 4). This aspect of video virality can be seen as a measure of success online and this is what makes TikTok exciting and interesting to young people and teenagers (Omar & Dequan, 2020). Another large element of social media networks, like Instagram, Vine and TikTok, is that the shared user-generated content on the platform creates a unique form of communication. This offers any user to create and share content and possibly grow a larger following (Omar & Dequan, 2020). This networked, user-generated nature of TikTok videos is so effective, because, like GIFs, they are "self-contained narratives that offer the viewer the set-up, resolution, punchline, and affect all within a tiny snippet" (Miltner & Highfield, 2017, p. 6). However, to counter the effective

and creative aspects of TikTok there is also a hateful and extremist side to the platform (Weimann & Masri, 2020). It has lured malicious users like far-right extremist groups, terrorist and paedophiles in to exploit the young users who are active on TikTok. The slack security from the platform regarding their rules, regulations and active eradication of these kinds of accounts has made it even easier for these groups to become increasingly active (Weimann & Masri, 2020). In this thesis, it is important to be aware of this negative side of the platform, as these groups target LGBTQ+ users and spread messages towards and about the LGBTQ+ community.

Moving on from TikTok specifically, it is key to understand social media networks as platforms within the notion of the platform society. Platforms, as defined by Van Dijck, Poell and De Waal (2018) in their book *The Platform Society,* can be seen as producers of both the online and offline worlds in which society lives. It is key to understand that platforms exist to organize the information flow and interactions between users. TikTok is a platform that offers users an option in the offline world to express themselves towards others online through creating videos, which in turn forms a space within society where users meet, interact and find information. It must also be noted that most platforms fall into one of two categories, either they are infrastructural or sectoral platforms. Infrastructural platforms are owned by one of the Big Five corporations (Apple, Alphabet-Google, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft) and are at the centre of the online ecosystem. Sectoral platforms are those that serve a specific niche or sector and these platforms still usually need or utilize information services from the Big Five ecosystem (Van Dijck, Poell & De Waal, 2018). TikTok can be understood as a sectoral platform as it is not owned by one of the Big Five Corporations. However, it uses elements like music, creating accounts with other social networks' login information and sharing content with others via social media, which are part of the infrastructural platforms.

Understanding the theoretical basis of elements and affordances of social networks is important, as this thesis will carry out a small affordance analysis of TikTok to clearly understand how the platform is being used by LGBTQ+ content creators. Social media or platform affordances can be understood as the possibilities of use that are discovered when an interaction between an agent and an object occurs (Harindranath, Bernroider & Kamel, 2015). There are three types of platform affordances: (1) physical affordances, which are

integrated into the platform so that people use them in a specific way, (2) relational affordances, which cover the interactions between people on the platform and (3) transactional affordances, which applies to any business exchanges among users (Harindranath, Bernroider & Kamel, 2015). This thesis will use the textual analysis level of the critical discourse analysis to specifically understand the physical and relational affordances of TikTok and its users. Transactional affordances are not of importance to this research.

It is key that social media affordances are seen and understood by the users, because if that does not happen users will not realize that a certain action or behaviour is possible and are unlikely to engage again (DeVito, Birnholtz & Hancock, 2017). It is also known that the affordances of different social media platforms help shape how users present or express themselves and participate online. This can, for example, be seen through liking, sharing or commenting on content and these are ways to show support or interest in others (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2019).

2.2 Everyday Activism

This next section of the theoretical framework will further examine the concept, introduced previously, everyday activism. First, the phenomenon of everyday activism online is analysed, critiqued and applied to this research. Second, the reasons or motivations to become an activistic person will be discussed.

The thesis is concerned with how everyday activism is used to share issues of social inequality online. A bigger impact is reached if individuals work together collectively and their stories and voices are circulated widely, which in turn will reach a larger number of audiences (Vivienne, 2011b). Nowadays, this is easily facilitated through posting personal stories or experiences in video, text or picture format on the Internet, mainly on social media networks. A good example of this is the collaborative video initiative; the *It Gets Better Project* (Jones, 2015). A diverse range of LGBTQ+ people, from celebrities to regular individuals, created hundreds of thousands of videos, sharing experiences of discrimination or insecurity and encouraging scared, closeted, young people that life eventually will get better. These kinds of projects "hold great potential to intervene in oppressive cultural arrangements and try to actively replace them with visions of possibility" (Jones, 2015, p.

318). This new kind of storytelling, publicly broadcasting private struggles, created a range of different effects; comforting victims of hate crimes, gaining sympathy from allies and onlookers as well as confronting the perpetrators. This is why the online space is so effective, as it allows the narrator to share different sides of their personal life to different kinds of hearers and overhearers, who associate with and listen to different parts of the story (Jones, 2015). However, it is also important to consider that there are substantial risks for members of the LGBTQ+ community to share their personal stories in public, online spaces. This prospect of reaching a wide unknown audience has a great influence upon the content that is shared in these videos (Vivienne, 2011a & 2011b). Then again, many of the participants explained that they were empowered to share their life on their terms and they anticipated that the small social changes that would arise from their openness would justify the risk (Vivienne, 2011b). This self-representation online can "normalize diversity and challenge restrictive views" by "acknowledging differences of age, race, ethnicity and culture" (Caldeira, De Ridder & Van Bauwel, 2018, p. 25).

It is key to feature how certain LGBTQ+ TikTok content creators inspire activistic behaviour in others. Through telling stories, some members of minorities develop what is known as parrhesia or fearless speech. This is "a verbal activity in which a speaker expresses his personal relationship to truth and risks his life because he recognizes truth-telling as a duty to improve or help other people (as well as himself)" (Foucault, 2001, p. 19). This could be interpreted as another reason why some people might become activistic within their minority groups. Some members use their voices, by simply revealing their sexual identity to unknown or invisible audiences, to challenge heteronormativity (Swank & Fahs, 2013). Telling stories or sharing personal details about oneself is motivated by a desire to have an impact on social attitudes in society or to lobby with politicians on issues of equality, family development opportunities or gay marriage. As mentioned above, this level of social change can only be realized through increased circulation of these activistic voices (Vivienne, 2011a & 2011b). This happens through both spreading information as wide as possible and getting as many people as possible discussing it. This can be considered another motivation to be activistic, by adding your voice to an existing wider conversation you help in connecting the message even further towards the intended audience (Literat & Kligler-Vilechik, 2019).

2.3 Online Identity

This third subsection of the theoretical framework will explain the concept of networked identity work (Vivienne & Burgess, 2012) and will draw on the notions of narrative identity and networked identity. These are important ideas to grasp, as this thesis will investigate both types of identity formation and (re)presentation by LGBTQ+ TikTok users.

In their research, Vivienne and Burgess (2012) combined the two concepts of networked publics and narrative identity into the idea of network identity work. They discovered that storytellers found how they fit into the society and its culture, through working on their identity, both in narratives in and in networks. When shaping their personal life stories, the storytellers already imagine any response they will receive from a wide range of people, either consciously or unconsciously (Vivienne, 2016). Online and digital tools for sharing a personal story offer the narrator more control over what elements of themselves to present. The constructed digital identities are usually refined, introspective versions of themselves. Networked identity work also helps in creating an (imagined) relationship or collaboration with any audience, either intimate or public. Furthermore, through storytelling, most narrators become more understanding of their individual and collective identities and its construction, which makes them feel more confidently connected to others as well as being empowered by their personal identity and life (Vivienne & Burgess, 2012). As this concept of networked identity work is a combination of narrative identity and networked identity, the following paragraphs will define those two concepts.

Because this thesis will critically analyse content shared on TikTok, it is important to further understand the concept of narrative identity as the TikTok content creators are telling a story, either autobiographical or about the LGBTQ+ community more generally. Narrative identity can be defined as the internal and developing story of the self, that is constructed to make sense, meaning, unity or purpose out of life (McAdams, 2011). This story is usually a selective reconstruction of that individual's life combining their personal past with whatever scenario they imagine for the future. This narrative identity is usually a combined product of that person's selves and the culture in which they act and identify (McAdams, 2011). According to Ricœur, narrative identity can be divided into two categories: sameness and selfhood. The category of 'sameness' describes parts of a person's narrative identity that does not change or hardly changes. 'Selfhood' is where change is

incorporated into a recognizable part of an identity. This mainly happens through (re)telling a life story, which gives the individual new insights into themselves about who they are and what they share in their stories with others (Crowley, 2003). Ricœur also outlined three moments of mimesis when constructing the narrative identity. First, prefiguration or mimesis$_1$ is where a person has experience of being in the world, however their identity has not fully formed yet, and so they are aware that there are elements of a life story, but this does not form one storyline yet. Second, configuration or mimesis$_2$ is where certain elements of a person's life experience are chosen, moulded and ordered into their life's narrative. Third, mediation or mimesis$_3$ concerns the moments in a person's life where they find a greater understanding of life experiences, which are usually considered transformative regarding themselves in the world (Crowley, 2003). This third element is usually when people start speaking out about very formative, important or significant moments in their lives to more people than just friends and family, as they have recognized and appropriated their life story to themselves. In modern society, many different groups identify with different narratives about themselves and are faced with different opportunities to share their lives, sometimes this comes with constraints (McAdams, 2011). "No single narrative can possibly organize the full and shifting scope of everyday social life" (McAdams, 2011, p. 102).

The following section will elaborate on how networked identity online will be used in this thesis and will draw on literature from other authors to explain this further. The concept has been discussed by many different academics, especially in the last few decades since the emergence of Web 2.0 and social media networks. boyd (2008) studied a few different social media sites in the early 2000s and developed the concept of networked publics. This can be understood as "the spaces and audiences that are bound together through technological networks" (boyd, 2008, p. 125). This notion is a type of mediated publics, because the online network mediates the interactions between its users. Users usually have more control online, because they can choose what information to share and so they get rid of any reactions from others that could happen in real-life communication. Identifying with a group or culture can be very empowering and this sometimes leads to being activistic or political for that community and/or culture. Some say that identity politics are unnecessary, however, those who identify within minority groups maintain that structural oppression is still very

apparent in most social environments (Marwick, 2013). This is where social media can become a very important tool for finding like-minded people within a certain minority group, where one can express solidarity with others or engage in activism. However, the online world of social networks can also create more oppression as homophobic, racist or sexist people will also make their voices and opinions be heard (Marwick, 2013).

Chapter 3: Method

The following chapter will introduce and discuss the method of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2013) as well as how it is applied in this research. The first section (3.1) will consist of a brief explanation of the chosen qualitative method: critical discourse analysis. The second section (3.2) will explain how the corpus is formed for this research and how the data is collected. The third section (3.3) will elaborate on how the critical discourse analysis is executed through the three levels of analysis. The last section (3.4) will summarize all the main results from the critical discourse analysis, and its supporting methods of interviewing and affordance analysis.

3.1 Explanation of the Method

For this thesis, a qualitative method will be used to research the effects of LGBTQ+ TikTok videos in the context of everyday activism. This qualitative method was preferred over quantitative methods because this research regards interpretation highly and is not focused on measuring systematic or causal relationships (Brennan, 2017). This thesis is aimed at finding messages and values of LGBTQ+ TikTok videos and their creators, which is more suitable to be researched qualitatively. Furthermore, regarding the two sub-questions, one pertaining more to the reach and content of the TikTok videos and the other relating more to the experience of LGBTQ+ TikTok creators, it is most practical to use critical discourse analysis and feature multiple qualitative approaches within this main method (Brennan, 2017).

The key method used in this thesis is critical discourse analysis (CDA), additionally, interviews and an affordance analysis approach are also used and will be explained in the following subsections. CDA is a method used to critically investigate issues within written or oral texts which assist in understanding social problems that are mediated by mainstream beliefs, cultural values and power relationships (Fairclough, 2013). Critical discourse analysis aims to find clear ties between discursive events or texts and the wider social, cultural processes and structures. This can be divided into three levels of analysis; (1) the actual texts, which are either written, spoken or visual, (2) the discursive practices and (3) the

larger social context of those two levels. This third level encompasses multiple ways to interpret these relationships (Mogashoa, 2014).
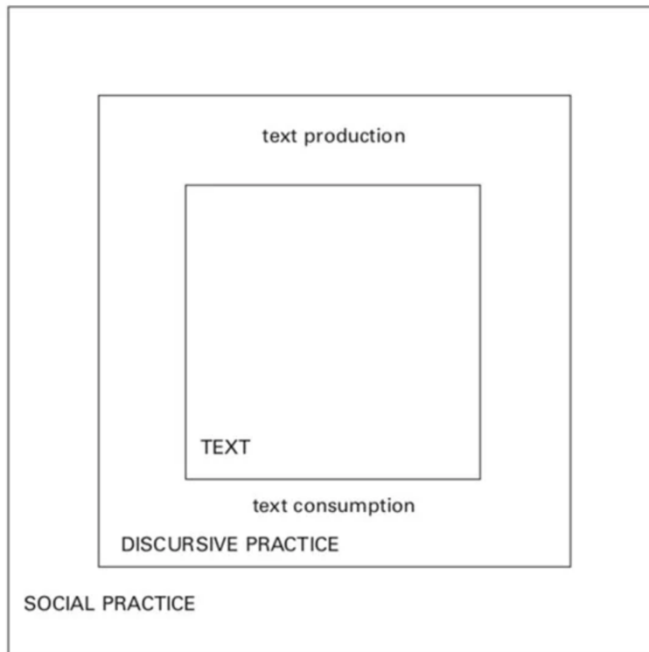

Figure 1 – *Fairclough's three-dimensional model for critical discourse analysis* (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002)

These three levels can be seen reproduced in the visual above. The critical discourse analysis is focused first on the actual texts and their use of language, which is seen in the most inner square. Second, the processes related to producing and consuming the text, which is the discursive analysis seen as the border around the textual level. Third, the social practice, where this kind of communicative event belongs, is represented by the outermost square (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). An advantage of using critical discourse analysis is that it can reveal "unspoken or unacknowledged aspects of human behaviour" and highlight or empower marginalized individuals or groups, which is especially relevant to this study about LGBTQ+ people (Mogashoa, 2014, p. 111). The critical discourse analysis approach is understood as interdisciplinary and problem-oriented, and it is usually key to incorporate some form of ethnography.

It is also important to consider how CDA can be applied to texts, discursive practices and social contexts within the digital realm of social media networks. Social media networks are considered to be systems that are composed of multiple world views, which facilitate communication to share meanings and interpretation opportunities between people and content (Albert & Salam, 2013). These conversations between users on social networking sites can create relationships, develop social situations and, most importantly, highlight power imbalances within certain social issues. Social media helps in empowering

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marginalized groups and key discourses within those inequality issues. This kind of empowerment and facilitation for social change is supported by critical discourse analysis as social media and CDA "both serve to improve reality for low-power societal groups" (Albert & Salam, 2013, p. 3). The connection and understanding of the relationship between CDA and social media networks are crucial to this thesis as it aims to investigate the marginalized group of LGBTQ+ people and how they are motivated to create, even small, social changes through TikTok as their social media platform.

To further apply the method of critical discourse analysis to this thesis, the three levels of analysis are key. The first level of textual analysis uses the content from many different TikTok videos and takes an affordance driven approach by quickly outlining TikTok's most important features that make this content possible to be shared and viewed as well as highlighting what elements restrict users. The second level, the discursive practice, is analysed by speaking to LGBTQ+ TikTok content creators through in-depth interviewing. The third level, which concerns the larger social contexts in which the other two analysis levels are situated, specifically outlines the social or cultural issues and inequalities that surround the LGBTQ+ community and how these could elicit social change. The combination of these frameworks is important in finding the most valuable answers to the research questions. The following two subsections will explain how both the interviews and platform affordance analysis are conducted.

3.1.1 Interviews

As the interviews are part of the discursive practice within critical discourse analysis, it is also important to outline how these interviews are conducted. Meaning the type of interview style as well as how the conversation is structured, between the interviewer and the participant. The interviews are semi-structured, which means that the interview questions are only used to help guide the conversation. There are multiple opportunities between the interviewer and the participant to engage in a more social conversation as well as ways to develop other directions of conversation, not featured in the interview guide, but beneficial to this research nonetheless (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). This interview style is chosen because its strengths lie in building rapport and having an open and natural flow of conversation with strangers (Brennan, 2017). The questions start with simple, conversational

inquiries about the participants' life and how they started on TikTok and develop to increasingly deeper questions about their presence online and self-presentation through TikTok videos. The chosen style to use in this thesis is in-depth interviewing as more personal, deep issues are of importance as well (Hofisi, Hofisi & Mago, 2014). Semi-structured, in-depth interviewing is the best method for collecting this kind of data, which is laden with personal narratives and deep thought, as some of the questions asked could result in sensitive or emotional responses from the participant (Hofisi, Hofisi & Mago, 2014).

      At the start of the interview, the participant is informed about the goals of the interview as well as what the research project contains as a whole. They are also asked to give their verbal consent to being recorded, either including video or only audio (Brennan, 2017). The open-ended questions are asked according to an interview guide, which features more than 10 main questions, and each include at least one sub-question to help the interviewee elaborate further if they have not already done so in answering the main question. This interview guide can be found in appendix A.

3.1.2 Affordance Analysis

To be able to perform a coherent discourse analysis of the textual level, which in this case is TikTok video content, it is key to understand how TikTok operates as a platform and what its affordances are. For this reason, a small platform affordance analysis is performed. Affordances, in this case, are the properties of certain functions, buttons and pages within the TikTok app, and these are analysed because the fundamental properties usually determine how this element could be interpreted by a user. Affordances are also understood as variable, because they describe the relationship between the actual properties of a feature and what people then do with these properties (Davis & Chouinard, 2017). Additionally it can also describe the relationship between the system and the user (Curinga, 2014).

      The mobile application of TikTok is a software and it is important to consider both what is happening on the platform as a "digital network, and how it is interpreted and shaped by people interacting with it" (Curinga, 2014). The affordances of any digital system are the actions that a user can execute which also immediately shows what the software is

capable of and suitable for. Analysing these affordances can help understand in outlining the functionality of the platform and how it operates within the appropriate boundaries (Curinga, 2014).

3.2 Data Collection

The following section will outline how the data is collected for the critical discourse analysis. Two types of data are needed for the analysis, both interviews and TikTok video content. First, the interviewees are sampled by going through the TikTok platform and finding outspoken, activistic or popular LGBTQ+ content creators. The main requirement to be sampled includes that this creator has to have posted at least two videos about their LGBTQ+ identity and/or LGBTQ+ rights, history or culture. There are also TikTok accounts that feature other well-known creators, like Glaad and *The It Gets Better Project*. As the content on these accounts are very relevant to this thesis, some of the creators who are featured there are also included in the sampling. A list is formed of around 20 TikTok creators, who's sexual or gender identities also range widely; gay, lesbian, trans, non-binary or queer. Through either their TikTok profile pages or their linked Instagram accounts, an email address is found, and multiple emails are sent out. The email informs the creator about the thesis topic and why they are being asked to help through an interview. Once a reply email is received, which sometimes includes additional questions, these are answered alongside an inquiry to which date or time the TikTok creator would be available for a 30-minute conversation. This usually leads to a confirmation of the meeting time and date, as well as the inclusion of a link in the email to join the Zoom meeting. At the start of the meeting, the participant gives their informed verbal consent to be interviewed and for the meeting to be recorded, either including or excluding video. Of the 20 creators that were contacted, around six replied, of which five people ultimately agreed to be interviewed.

Second, to be able to research the textual level of critical discourse analysis, TikTok video content had to be collected to do so. Before the data is collected, the researcher creates a checklist to help guide what is required for a video to be collected. A video has to feature at least one of these elements, however, it is preferred if the video checks more than two of the boxes. The full video requirement checklist can be found in appendix B. There are two ways in which this data is collected. First, the videos from those people who were

contacted via email to participate in the interview process are collected. These creators have already been identified as very valuable to the LGBTQ+ side of the TikTok platform and it is apparent that they post activistic content or personal stories about their LGBTQ+ life. Five videos of each of the interviewed creators is collected. A smaller amount, 3 videos, is collected from those who were emailed and had not participated in the interview stage. The videos from these creators are also held up against the checklist before they are confirmed to be collected. The second way in which LGBTQ+ TikTok videos are collected is by finding videos manually and scrolling through the main hashtags from the requirement checklist. The videos that specifically speak on LGBTQ+ issues, personal struggles or the community and its culture within those hashtags are collected. The amount of which depends on the density of relevant content, but around four or five videos for each hashtag are collected. Combined with the videos from the emailed creators, 85 videos in total are collected and will be analysed. Because the TikTok algorithm randomly selects what content, at which moment, from which content creator does well and gains a lot of interactions, views or likes, the level of popularity of that video is not taken into consideration. This also means that the comment section ranges from less than ten comments to over 50.000, and therefore the most common and repeated responses are collected.

3.3 Performing CDA

The following section will feature how a critical discourse analysis is executed throughout the three levels of analysis outlined previously. The first level of textual analysis (3.3.1) concerns a small affordance analysis of the TikTok mobile app as well as a critical analysis of TikTok video content and its resulting comments. Second, the analysis of the discursive practice (3.3.2) features the thoughts and opinions gained from interviewing five LGBTQ+ content creators. The third level of social practice (3.3.3) situates both of the previous analyses within the bigger context of LGBTQ+ rights and everyday activism.

3.3.1 Textual Analysis

To be able to critically analyse the video content shared through TikTok, multiple affordances are important to consider. Once the user has created an account or logged in, upon opening the app they immediately arrive on the 'For You' page. The video content fills up the whole

screen and the audio, as well as the video, immediately starts playing. On the right edge of the playing video there are multiple options, however most important are the likes and comment section. A heart icon shows how many likes that video has and when tapped, the user also likes it. The icon below that is the comment icon, it again shows how many comments have been given. When tapped the user can leave their own comment or read the comments left by others. The video creator can also make a new video specifically responding to one comment, the comment will then appear in the video and the comment section will show that a video reply was made.

This format of playing video content and interacting with it, is repeated in other areas of the platform; the 'following' feed, as well as the discover page and its search options. The search feature is most interesting to this research, as here specific users, videos, sounds and hashtags can be found. When a word is searched, an overview appears of the most popular videos, hashtags, sounds and accounts associated with that word. Additionally, four separate tabs show each of these elements individually. In the hashtag tab, the user can select which hashtag they initially meant while searching. Then a list of videos appears, which are ordered decreasingly according to the number of likes. This research mainly uses the hashtag or accounts sections within the search feature to collect the data, as well as the likes and comment section of each video to analyse the effects of the video content.

After collecting the videos from activistic LGBTQ+ content creators and different hashtags, each video is analysed on the type of content or narrative that the video discussed as well as the responses and reactions shared within the comment section of the video. In the comments of videos about coming out, identity discrimination, prejudice, or information on LGBTQ+ rights, there were three discourses found. The first type of comments supports the video's creator by encouraging them or providing positive feedback. Second, users share their personal stories and experiences relating to the video's content. Third, people share emotional responses to how those videos moved them or made them feel heard and inspired.

Videos that spoke about any of the topics featured in the checklist, but in a more comedic way usually gain a lot of laughter interactions, like emojis or 'hahahaha' and

comments quoting a funny part of the video. These videos usually also elicit responses that the viewers can relate to that situation or story.

Video replies to hateful comments gain a mixture of interesting responses. The most common responses agree with what the creator was saying, as they usually explain or disagree with that hate comment so commenters feel bad for the creator receiving these negative responses. Secondly, there were a significant number of comments found that agree with the original hateful comment and add more negative or discriminatory messaging to the dialogue. The third most common response was that from accounts who do not fully understand what certain LGBTQ+ concepts mean and they asked for elaboration, showing a willingness to learn even when not part of the LGBTQ+ community.

3.3.2 Discursive Practice

This level of analysis aims to critically analyse the features of discourse practices, which outline how the text was produced or constituted (Mogashoa, 2014). To fully discover for which reasons the TikTok videos were produced, five LGBTQ+ activistic content creators were interviewed. The content posted most frequently by these five creators concerns LGBTQ+ rights or issues (in the news media), personal stories of coming out or feeling discriminated against, validating others and their journeys of self-discovery, and educating or helping others to understand different aspects of LGBTQ+ culture better.

To start with the motivations that were expressed on why they initially joined TikTok and what made them want to post videos about these kinds of topics. The majority of the content creators said that they were bored, with hardly anything to do, at the start of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, which made them join TikTok as this was a growing trend. Some had already built up a small platform of spreading awareness of LGBTQ+ issues on other social media and then started making TikTok content around the same topics. However, the main motivator for all of them to post these videos was that they wanted to educate others and help insecure (young) people who were in the process of discovering who they were. Two out of the five content creators shared that they had used the Internet, either through LGBTQ+ public influencers or private, anonymous users on forums, to help them in discovering their sexual or gender identity, which in turn supported them coming out of the closet. This made them want to return the favour by sharing their own stories.

One of the TikTok creators said that they had never seen a person like them in both offline and online spaces of social media as well as traditional media, which was their motivator to put their story and experiences forward.

After setting up a TikTok account and creating their first videos, all of the content creators started to understand how to use the platform in their favour to create a following and gain views. This meant that their videos were being viewed by more and more people, which in turn also meant that more users started to leave comments. These comments ranged widely from uplifting feedback or stories to mean and hateful replies. Four out of the five creators shared that even though the hate messages are very prevalent on the platform, they are more motivated by the positive messages from users who have experienced similar things, who have come out of the closet or avoided committing suicide because of the creators' content. These comments in combination with wanting to create more awareness and to destigmatize LGBTQ+ issues, motivated the LGBTQ+ creators to keep posting videos regardless of the hate that they were receiving. Only one of the interviewees shared that they did not like how much uncontrollable hate there was on the platform and that they were slowly trying to post less and less, for the sake of their mental health.

Lastly, the creators were asked if they believed that their content on TikTok as well as other videos of LGBTQ+ activism on the platform could promote social or cultural change. All of them agreed that this could happen, but more so that it is happening. They saw in their comments section and direct messages how they are educating users who are not aware of these issues and that they are helping parents or allies of the LGBTQ+ community understand and come to terms with how people in their direct circles identify. When asked if they believed this to be a form of everyday activism, all five react very positively to the idea that even doing small things, like sharing a personal story or leaving a comment, can create little ripples of effect and change in everyday spaces. This again was the main motivator for the TikTok creators to continue posting about LGBTQ+ issues and their personal experiences.

3.3.3 Social Practice

The third level of analysis in critical discourse analysis is the dimension of social practice, where texts and discursive practices are combined to understand the relationships or processes between them within society. The society that this research is situated in is mainly understood as Western, first world countries, generally concerning Europe and North

America. The majority of the discourses discovered in the other two levels tried to create any form of social change for minority groups as well as presenting an accurate representation of the positivity within the LGBTQ+ community, to help destigmatize its members.

Many of the videos found on TikTok, as well as the creators' understanding of their content, shared that the level of inequality, discrimination and stigmatization is still a large part of why the LGBTQ+ community has to use their voices to create, even small, social change. A large amount of hate comments that the interviewed creators and others receive on every single piece of content, LGBTQ+ related or not, they post can be overwhelming and disheartening for some. Not only for the creator of the video but also for those who watch this content to feel validated, loved or understood by someone like them. These young, sometimes closeted individuals can also notice these kinds of comments and feel worse about their struggles with their sexual or gender identity. The TikTok platform does not afford a functional way to report or block users and their inappropriate comments. Seeing this negativity spread to many LGBTQ+ people and their content, make some want to fight and spread more positive, helpful, educational or activistic content. In one instance, in the comment section of videos from LGBTQ+ educator Desmond Fambrini, who actively replies to hate comments, there were quite a few instances of people replying that his messages and respectful way of communicating had helped them to stop being homophobic. These people shared that they at least respected the LGBTQ+ community but that they did not fully understand it.

The other discourse most prominently found throughout the textual analysis and the discursive practices is the types of positive representations offered by the LGBTQ+ community, while negatively representing the 'others', as a means to justify the levels of inequality. In most of the video content, the LGBTQ+ creator showed the positive sides of their personal identity as well as creating empathy by sharing their own stories of discrimination or hate, which in turn puts mainly heterosexual people in a negative light. This was also highlighted when hate comments were addressed. Additionally, during the discursive practice level, the content creators were asked if they felt like their online identities and personalities were accurate representations of themselves. All five creators said that who they are online is very similar to the person they are in real life. However,

some mentioned that there are, of course, aspects of their personal life or personality that they do not share online. Either because they consider that to be private information or because they feel like their brand online is mainly concerned with LGBTQ+ issues, which restrains them from sharing other personality traits.

3.4 Main Results

To conclude, through using the three levels of critical discourse analysis and additional methods, the main results of data collection and analysis were found. The textual analysis of the TikTok video content found that a wide range of topics as well as formats of sharing was prevalent on the platform. After the analysis, around eight different types and formats of LGBTQ+ content were found, including personal coming out stories, internal or societal struggles with sexual or gender identity, information on LGBTQ+ rights and culture as well as many creators validating and understanding those who need to hear their message. The textual analysis also looked into the comments section where again a range of different kinds of reactions was shared. Most frequent were comments that agreed with the creators' message, supported the content or shared how relatable these stories were to their own life. Another common response included users sharing their own stories or insecurities around the topic that was discussed in the video. Lastly, a large number of the comments consisted of hateful, derogatory, mean or insulting comments from homophobic or transphobic people.

During the second level of interviewing more interesting discourse were highlighted by the LGBTQ+ content creators themselves. All of them shared that their goal in creating these kinds of videos was to educate others outside of the LGBTQ+ community, helping those who are trying to discover themselves and destigmatizing the idea that identifying as LGBTQ+ is negative. Most of them said that because of the reactions they were receiving they felt that their content was making a difference, mostly regarding young people who are figuring out and trying to understand their own identity. The LGBTQ+ TikTok creators believed that their content could create social change, even if it was very little, as the received comments shared that these TikTok videos had helped users become more accepting of the LGBTQ+ community.

Lastly, the social practice level of critical discourse analysis clearly outlined how the creation of this type of activistic LGBTQ+ content, even if this is not always intentional, is

creating little shifts in recognition and power among TikTok users and their immediate surroundings. How the content creators are motivated to continue sharing their personal stories or LGBTQ+ information does reflect that they feel like this is making a difference in real, everyday lives.

Conclusion

This concluding chapter will discuss how this thesis' research contributed to answering the main research question and sub-questions, using both the academic support from the theoretical framework and the findings from the critical discourse analysis. This chapter will also discuss the strengths and limitations of this research, as well as suggestions for possible future research in a couple of reflective paragraphs.

Answering the Research Questions

The main research question of this thesis asked: how are LGBTQ+ TikTok creators motivated to create everyday activism within their networked identity and beyond? By speaking to the LGBTQ+ content creators and by analysing both their videos and other related videos on the platform, it can be said that everyday activism is very prevalent on the platform and seeing others creating this change is also what motivates them to post content surrounding these LGBTQ+ issues. The content creators' networked identity is formed through being part of the LGBTQ+ community online and seeing them relate to others as well as other LGBTQ+ people relate to them, means that their influence can reach so many users. By sharing stories from their everyday lives, like pieces of information, funny anecdotes and difficult times from their past, the LGBTQ+ content creators believed that they were making small, everyday differences in the lives of others as well (Vivienne, 2011a & 2011b). This was also reflected by the comments underneath their videos, as users shared that they felt recognized by these stories or empowered to come out of the closet themselves or that they understood and accepted the LGBTQ+ community more because they watched impactful TikTok video content. Beyond the immediate networked identity of the LGBTQ+ community and other LGBTQ+ users, creators, viewers on the platform it was shared by some that they heard from some people that their content helped them understand the LGBTQ+ community and culture better or that they changed their homophobic or transphobic mindsets. During the interviews, the LGBTQ+ content creators agreed that their content could create social and cultural change, even if it was on a smaller scale by helping others with their personal struggles around sexuality or gender identity. The video creators hoped that because of the amount of impactful social media activism that is being created currently, like other

examples of iconic activism: the Black Lives Matter movement and awareness around climate change, that the discussion of LGBTQ+ issues online could also create similar effects in the future. However, they all believed that their videos are helping create change in little ways in the everyday lives of others which were deemed impactful enough for them to continue making TikTok video content about these issues and challenges.

Next to the main research question, two sub-questions have also found their answer through this research. First, how have popular LGBTQ+ TikTok users used their platforms to increase awareness and destigmatize the LGBTQ+ narrative? The most effective and common way in which they used their platform was by sharing their personal experiences with others. Many other types of videos were found that helped increase awareness around LGBTQ+ issues slightly, like educational videos explaining certain LGBTQ+ topics, replies to hateful comments and comedic sketches about relatable situations or conversations within the LGBTQ+ community. However, the majority of comments that expressed support, understanding and acceptance were found under videos where LGBTQ+ creators shared personal stories of their life, their journey with their gender or sexual identity and/or the challenges they faced as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. During the interviews, some of the content creators also shared that these types of personal videos were very valuable to them personally as well, because they contained the TikTok creators' own life and because they saw what kind of effect it has on their viewers and followers. This is a clear example of networked identity work (Vivienne & Burgess, 2012) as sharing their personal story online has provided TikTok creators with a network of connections who relate and empathize with their daily challenges. Creating this personal type of content also inspired them to continue making videos surrounding LGBTQ+ issues because the inspiring comments and the drive from the TikTok algorithm to possibly create a viral video motivated them to create a bigger impact and reach a wider audience. This affordance of virality is what makes TikTok unique and drives its users to continuously produce content (Omar & Dequan, 2020; Vijak & Gekker, 2021).

The second sub-question was: in what ways does the sharing of personal stories contribute to the self-representation of LGBTQ+ TikTok creators? During the interviews, the TikTok video creators explained that the personal messages and challenging life stories they share online help them understand their own identities better and help develop their

personal knowledge on different topics, by reading the comments and messages their videos receive. This narrative identity that they have formed around themselves can be considered to be part of the third stage of mimesis, where a person feels confident about their personal life story to start sharing it with people outside their immediate circles (Crowley, 2003). All five of them shared that they present a heightened version of their personality online and also consciously decide what aspects of their life to share and what not. The identities shared online are refined, introspective versions of themselves (Vivienne & Burgess, 2012). Some shared that they would prefer to make video content about different topics than just LGBTQ+ activism and awareness, as they have more interests and personality traits to share than just their gender or sexual identity. There are two reasons why LGBTQ+ TikTok creators do not share every detail of their personality online, and why they make careful considerations about what to share and what not. The first reason concerns personal branding and what types of content will do well on the platform. TikTok's algorithm favours creators who constantly post about similar topics as it will recommend those videos more often to the users who have shown interest in that type of content. Therefore, some of the creators feel like they cannot post videos about any other topics as this will not be shown to their followers or any new viewers. The second reason relates to the amount of hate comments their videos receive regularly. Most of the interviewed TikTok creators said that they were aware of those comments and chose to keep posting regardless as they felt like their videos were helping others in similar situations. Which is a good example of fearless speech, because the motivation to keep going to help others was greater than the fear of being discriminated against. However, some shared that those comments really affected them and made them hesitant in sharing certain personal life stories in fear of receiving hateful replies on a sensitive personal issue. This closely relates to how their networked identity is mediated by space in which you situate yourself within the social media network as well as relations you create when you put yourself online. Creating an interesting, networked identity by finding like-minded people is one thing, however this online world is also used by hateful people, who will make their voices and opinions be heard (boyd, 2011; Marwick, 2013).

Strengths and Limitations

This research has both strengths and limitations that come along with it. One of the limitations is situated around the limited sample size set by this research. A larger amount of data is available to be collected, especially when considering the abundance of content on the TikTok platform in terms of the number of videos posted and the number of users commenting and using TikTok. This limitation also could relate to the reliability of this research as the collection of more data could have resulted in different outcomes or answers for the research questions. If this research was exactly replicated by a different researcher, the outcomes could be different as critical discourse analysis allows for many different interpretations of the TikTok content, comments and interviews. Around 80 videos were collected and analyzed, five TikTok content creators were interviewed and this amount was mainly due to time constraints. More people could have been interviewed and more videos could have been viewed however the time for finishing the thesis did not allow this.

The chosen theoretical framework and methodology also bring limitations with them. This research is situated in a very specific lens of theory, especially regarding the specific platform and its affordances, identity and activism. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, there has been much research done about LGBTQ+ representation and people in social media spaces (Cavalcante, 2019; Duguay, 2019; Herrera, 2018), as well as some recent projects on the different aspects of TikTok (Ledbetter & Meisner, 2021; Vijay & Gekker, 2021; Weimann & Masri, 2020). It is still important to note that this thesis does not conflict with those earlier theories or findings and that it brings a new range of thoughts to the table. Critical discourse analysis also has its limitations as this method does not allow for large quantitative research. Due to the limited sample size, as discussed above, certain types of findings and research fall outside of the critical discourse analysis. Within critical discourse analysis, it is also important to consider the context of social media activism, as it is not fully understood how much these TikTok content creators contribute to the efforts of activism on a larger, political level.

Ethically, the interviewed participants were well informed about the aims and goals of this thesis through the email exchanges as well as a short introduction by the researcher at the start of the interview meeting. All participants were also asked to give their verbal consent to the recording of the interview for analysis purposes and were asked if their name

and any other personal information they shared during the interview could be used in the thesis. The participants were also told that they were allowed to stop the interview at any time and that they could refuse to answer any of the questions if they were uncomfortable sharing that information. Collecting and performing the textual analysis of TikTok videos and comments were assumed to be ethically correct, as all this information and content is out in the public domain for anyone to see and research.

The strengths of this research are related to the academic relevance of this thesis, as LGBTQ+ activism on TikTok and its motivations in creators' networked identity have not been researched before. Especially as critical discourse analysis was used as the methodological approach and TikTok being the platform under analysis; a relatively new and not thoroughly researched social media network. It is hoped that this thesis could have an impact on how content creators could create everyday activism that results in social change for the LGBTQ+ community, but it is more likely that future research can use this thesis as a basis.

Academic research projects in the future could look at any other social issues that are actively being discussed on TikTok, like the large Black Lives Matter movement and topics like climate change and gender equality, through a similar lens. The research from this thesis could also be applied to other social media or online platforms. It can be said that LGBTQ+ issues, the community and their fight for more awareness and social acceptance will continue to be an important aspect for societal change as well as academic research.

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Note: all 5 of the interviewees asked to receive the final thesis to understand and read what had come from their contribution.

Appendices

Appendix A - Interview Guide

1. Please tell me a little about yourself
    - What is your name?
    - How old are you?
    - How do you identify with the LGBTQ+?
2. Why did you start posting videos on TikTok?
    - What kind of content did you start with?
    - Is this part of your full-time job now?
    - What do you like most about your content?
3. What is your favourite thing about the platform?
    - Compared against Instagram or Twitter?
    - What do you enjoy watching yourself?
4. What is your least favourite thing?
    - What elements do you prefer from other social media?
    - How do you think TikTok can improve on this?
5. Do you feel that your stories/content connect to people?
    - What do you see in the comments or duets or stitch videos?
    - What is your favourite story that you've seen from a follower/video watcher?
    - Are you aware of this when making content?
6. If you don't mind me asking when did you come out?
    - Did you have the Internet or any other resources available to find people like you?
    - If not, would you have appreciated it then?
    - Do you see this happening now more?
7. Do you feel because you learned from other LGBTQ+ people during your coming out process that it is your responsibility to help others?
    - Based on research I've read this is sometimes the case
8. How do you feel about activism on the platform?
    - Examples like LGBTQ+ issues, black lives matter, climate change
    - Do you see activistic comments, replies, etc. on your content?
9. Do you think that (LGBTQ+) TikTok content can also promote social/cultural change?
    - Have you heard any examples of this happening?
    - Do you know of everyday activism and its effects?
10. How do you feel about sharing your personal stories & challenges online?
    - Why do you feel the need, urge, want to do this?
    - Are you ever afraid of what you are sharing?
11. Do you feel you present an authentic, real representation of yourself online?
    - If yes, how do you decide what to share and what not to share?
    - If not, why is that?

Appendix B - Checklist

The following tables were used during the data collection stage of the research. The hashtags in bold were specifically used to find the videos. Within that hashtag the researcher checked the boxes of any other hashtags that the creator has used when posting the video. The researcher also checked off what type of content was discussed in the video in the other table. Of each hashtag in bold, five videos were collected and analyzed and added to the textual level of CDA.

☑	**Hashtags**:
	#lgbtq
	#lgbt
	#queer
	#gay
	#bi
	#lesbian
	#trans
	#queertok
	#gaytiktok
	#lgbthistory
	#lgbtrights
	#lgbtissues
	#transrights
	#comingout
	#itgetsbetter
	#gaypride

☑	**Content describes:**
	LGBTQ+ rights & issues
	Personal stories about coming out / showing the coming out moment
	Personal stories about struggles/challenges with sexuality
	Queer history
	(Fun) facts or tips about queer culture
	Validation of identity & sexuality (it gets better)
	Moments of discrimination
	Comedic sketches or jokes around queer issues