

THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL CHANGE
FOR PEOPLE OF DIVERSE GENDER
IDENTITIES AND SEXUALITIES

THESIS

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THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL CHANGE
FOR PEOPLE OF DIVERSE GENDER
IDENTITIES AND SEXUALITIES

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM	4
III. RESEARCH.....	6
IV. CREATIVE PROCESS	10
Phase one: Investigation and planning.....	10
Phase two: Development and audience and user research.....	12
CONCLUSION.....	18
Future research.....	20
APPENDIX A: STUDENT GROUP SURVEY	23
APPENDIX B: INITIAL SITE LAYOUT AND FUNCTIONALITY (ILLUSTRATED).....	28
APPENDIX C: CHANGES MADE FOLLOWING STUDENT GROUP TESTING (ILLUSTRATED).....	30
APPENDIX D: USER/AUDIENCE TESTING QUESTIONNAIRE	31
APPENDIX E: WALKTHROUGH OF COMPLETED SITE AS SEEN BY TEST USERS (ILLUSTRATED)	34

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Question 1 and Responses from the User-Testing Questionnaire	22
2. Question 3 and Responses from the User-Testing Questionnaire	22
3. Question 5 and Responses from the User-Testing Questionnaire	22

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Chart of Paul Nini's design methodology.....	16
2. Three initial layout concepts.....	16
3. Initial concept for icon system.....	17

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Society at large within the United States has improved its understanding and treatment of sexual minorities and gender identity minorities in recent decades. The American Psychiatric Association, for instance, ceased to define homosexuality as an illness in 1973, and the same happened for transgender identity in 2012 (Beredjick, 2012). Same-sex marriage is increasingly legal across the states. Public opinion towards gays and lesbians is ever improving. However, recent polling still shows significant numbers seeing gays and lesbians in a discriminatory light: recently 46% of US adults said same-sex marriage should not be legal (Newport, 2012b), and 30% were against gay and lesbian adoption rights (Newport, 2012a). Major polling institutions Gallup, Inc. and Pew Research Center do not even appear to look at discriminatory attitudes toward transgender individuals.

The labels of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, collected under the initialism of LGBT, constitute the best-known minority sexual and gender identities within mainstream US culture. It needs to be acknowledged that these are not the only non-mainstream gender and sexuality labels in existence, and that a much greater number of labels still could not represent the totality of individuals' experiences of gender and sexuality outside heterosexuality and cisgender identity. Eaklor shows the ways political organizing in the 1990s often happened around notions of separate identities—that is,

specific organizations formed for lesbian advocacy, transgender advocacy, and so on (2008, pp. 206–210). While there may be advantages to treating transgender, bisexual, gay, and lesbian identity and representation separately—wherein advocacy projects have to address only one of these categories and not the others—I have decided to take the established LGBT acronym as a starting point for this project and assume that any possible non-mainstream sexuality or gender identity should be included if these identities are ever to be considered together at all. As the LGBT acronym is inadequate for this purpose, a more suitable term must be found. Eaklor explains that although the word *queer* has troubling associations for some given its history as a derogatory term, others including academics “believe the stigma [associated with the word] can be removed through associating it with visibility and pride” (2008, p. 2). For that reason, *queer* will serve to stand in for this nebulous continuum of identities in the space of this paper. Another term used in this paper, *trans** (including the asterisk), encompasses “transgender people and all gender non-conforming identities” (Vaden Health Center, n.d.), and is meant to be included in the designation *queer* as I use it in this paper.

In addition to the legacy of queer advocacy activism, the advancement of queer acceptance in society can be attributed to a (slowly) improving image of queer people in the media. A survey released in 2008 that was conducted on behalf of GLAAD, an organization that monitors media portrayals of LGBT people, found 19% of respondents claiming that “their feelings towards gays and lesbians have become more favorable over the past five years,” with 34% percent of these respondents attributing this change in part to gay and lesbian appearances on TV, and 29% to appearances in movies (Harris

Interactive, 2008, p. 8). But even as political standing, public opinion, and media representations improve, problems in these areas remain.

CHAPTER II

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

It is important to note that the complex reality of queer identities and communities means the problems that queer people face are complex and varied. These problems still exist in spite of wide gains in public opinion and law, and some still go unacknowledged in mainstream discussions of queer issues (which still frequently manifest as discussions of only gay and lesbian issues).

Anti-trans*, anti-gay, and related hate crimes are still common, having increased by possibly 13% between 2009 and 2010 (Romney, 2011). Television programs that may have positive implications for gays and lesbians still make considerable missteps in dealing with related issues. Ryan Murphy's *Glee* and *The New Normal*, two currently running fictional TV programs which speak out for gay and lesbian issues, have been criticized respectively for employing an anti-trans* slur (Kane, 2010) and for appearing to mock intersex people (Lang, 2013). Meanwhile, the denial or overlooking of bisexuality in public discourse is still common (Anderson-Minshall, 2011). Queer identities beyond the specific domains of LGBT rarely see prominent discussion, and may face discrimination within the queer community itself if and when visibility does increase: Bahler (n.d.) shows negative reactions from queer people towards the idea of asexuals being counted within the queer community. Legal same-sex marriage could be seen as a cornerstone issue for queer rights and is certainly an area where large gains

have been made, and yet as stated in the Introduction, it still sees significant opposition. These are complex issues which cannot be overcome by a single effort.

Yet in this thesis, I will show that there is potential in the media (and by extension, in communication design) to change people's minds in a way that can help advance public understanding of queer people and thus help correct the above social problems. In spite of my project's inability to produce (or at least quantify) change in its audience, it still shows internet-based media as a valuable avenue for presenting a positive narrative about a social minority, and it shows that internet-based media could still play a role in promoting positive social change.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH

There is a well-attested phenomenon called *cultivation* by which otherwise diversified people share common conceptions of reality as a result of repeated exposure to television (Morgan, Shanahan, Signorielli, 2008). If this is the case, it supports a broader notion that mainstream media messages support common conceptions of reality, and this includes realities such as gender identity, sexual orientation, and the like. Thus, where there are failings in media representations of queer people and queer issues, stereotypes and misconceptions will be allowed to prevail, and there will be problems with public opinion and therefore with the advancement of rights, the project of ending violence against queer people, and so on.

Cultivation effects take hold over “long periods of time” (Morgan et al., p. 36). However, it shouldn’t follow that long periods of exposure to realities *contrary* to those that dominate television are necessary to challenge such effects. It is worth exploring whether a direct and decisive complication of media reality with a new or unusual message could perhaps shift a person’s ideas, whatever their origin, particularly if such a complication were based in reality, rather than being fictional. Similar to the contemporary journalistic notion of fact-checking, this could serve as conception-checking or framework-checking to show a person a truer notion of reality not seen in the

mainstream media. It could challenge assumptions and present factual, authentic accounts of queer lives.

The case for this intervention is bolstered by data from Gallup which “do make a strong case that knowing someone who is gay or lesbian fosters more accepting attitudes on many of the issues surrounding gay and lesbian relations today” (Morales, 2009). If knowing queer people affects one’s attitudes toward them or toward queer issues positively, a media intervention could stand in for face-to-face interactions with queer people where such interactions are untenable, and could possibly encourage that positive perspective.

A further precedent for using a media intervention to promote social good has been established by entertainment-education (E-E) programs in developing countries, where entertainment media created specifically for the purpose of promoting positive behavior change in viewers (for instance, changing personal behavior to better avoid contracting or spreading HIV) has had considerable success (Harris, 2009, p. 346).

A television intervention would be cost-prohibitive for an everyday activist hoping to help positive social change along (and help sustain the gains already made). The internet, however, provides a lower barrier to entry. Thus the solution I posed was a website which shows both the diversity of queer identities and the diversity of the content of queer lives, which could provide a useful intervention to break down or prevent stereotypes and misconceptions.

A number of projects exist which approach a related problem in a similar way but still leave a need for this project.

It Gets Better is an internet-based campaign begun by columnist Dan Savage and his partner Terry Miller, in which participants—some are famous, many are not—create videos sharing messages of hope for struggling queer youth. Savage began this project in response to the suicides of several young men who were gay or perceived to be gay (Savage, 2011, pp. 3–4), and so it does not focus on straight and cisgender perceptions of queer identities.

I'm from Driftwood is a project which documents stories from queer people with an emphasis on geographic diversity. Its mission is less explicitly related to social change, with a statement on the website alluding to “an apolitical forum for LGBTQ stories from every age, race, gender, background and culture to deepen our understanding of each other, preserve our history, and open hearts and minds” (I'm from Driftwood, n.d.).

The *New York Times* produced a feature on its website in 2011 called “Coming Out.” The feature is made up of stories from queer youth about their lives and their sexuality or gender identity. It most prominently included professional photography and video, but also allowed reader submissions in written form. (After the feature was published, submissions were eventually closed.) An article in the *Times* about the feature states that it was begun “as an effort to better understand this generation’s realities and expectations, and to give teenagers their own voice in the conversation” (Kramer, 2011).

The project of a fair and equal footing in society for queer people (and this must include a freedom to be open about gender identity and sexual practice in the way that cisgender and heterosexual people are free to be open about those things) is no less complicated than any other human rights project. It would be naïve to assume that a

single intervention from any one medium or toward any one sample audience would have a demonstrable, permanent, or totally positive effect. Projects such as mine rather have a twofold value: first, as drops in the bucket, countering negative conceptions and underrepresentation of queer people in society on a level that is minor but potentially still helpful; and second, as an exploration and examination of people's real perceptions and of their immediate reactions to media campaigns.

CHAPTER IV

CREATIVE PROCESS

In developing this project, I followed a model developed by Paul Nini of a general design process in distinct phases that is meant to be adaptable to specific design projects (Nini, 2006, p. 118). The model is divided into “Phase One: Investigation + Planning” and “Phase Two: Development + User/Audience Research” (Figure 1). Phase one, in which problems are identified and strategies are considered, includes a “competitive audit” and the identification of “desirable attributes and outcomes” for the project. Phase two, in which the design is developed and tested, places a specific emphasis on audience and user participation in the design process.

Phase one: Investigation and planning. In phase one the first step was to consider the reality of the social condition of queer people and to try to determine problems and their causes. As a self-identified gay man I was already acquainted with queer issues and had many friends who identified themselves with queer labels. The continued existence of hateful or ambivalent sentiment toward gays in the American mainstream as well as hate towards and ignorance regarding other queer people was already apparent in my daily life.

I was influenced by flourishing internet-based communities of queer people which I was already aware of. I had mainly witnessed these communities through the social media service Tumblr (although similar associations exist on other social media such as

Twitter). Tumblr allows users to host free public blogs for sharing written text, photos, and the like. A user on Tumblr can repost something posted by another user and add a comment, which the previous user can then see, in a process called *reblogging*. Users in these communities discuss aspects of queer life and identity often passionately and positively. I was thus interested to see how this emerging technology could be used to promote positive social change.

In order to investigate the relevance of such a project to queer lives, I conducted a survey (see Appendix A) with a small student group. The survey was meant to provide a qualitative look at three broad issues: how queer people used the internet to talk about themselves, how this compared with their lives offline, and what they personally thought about media representations of people like themselves. I received four readable responses. The respondents' answers identifying their gender identity and sexuality varied somewhat, but all respondents were queer (in the sense defined in this paper). All respondents used the internet to post in some medium about their gender or sexuality. Responding to the question "What do you think about the quality of media representations (on TV, in movies, in the news) of people with your gender identity or sexuality?" all four indicated that they saw at least some "poor portrayals"; two indicated "mainly poor portrayals: I feel people like me are unfairly represented."

The survey thus established that online queer communities are in fact relevant to queer people, and it lent validity to my understanding that media representations of queer people are still largely problematic.

This reinforced my strategy of using web-based media showcased on one website which I would design to disrupt the mainstream narrative of queer lives. With regards to

Nini's consideration of "desirable attributes and outcomes," I decided the site would be an immersive, engaging website which would subvert audience misconceptions about queer people.

Phase two: Development and audience and user research. The first explorations of design concepts diverge from Nini's methodology in that I did not approach users. Rather, my thesis chair provided input as I completed initial concepts and eventually began to engineer the site live. I chose to build the site on Tumblr because queer communities were already established there, and so users could potentially have reblogged entries from my site, which could gain exposure for the project.

Initial basic design problems involved selecting words and images to use on the site, arranging them in a usable way, and deciding how to communicate the queer aspects of the subjects' identities in a way that fostered open-mindedness and understanding.

Early on I attempted to contact existing Tumblr users who were publicly discussing their gender and sexuality on the site to solicit submissions to my project. However, a lack of responsiveness from prospective contributors and initial difficulty finding any at all proved this approach unfeasible for a site that would need a number of entries to be effective.

I also searched the internet for examples of journalism where op-ed writers discussed their gender or sexuality and their lives, or where queer people were quoted talking about their lives or discussing personal convictions. My chair and I quickly decided that too much journalistic content detracted from the personal and expressive qualities of the project.

I thus decided to use Tumblr's reblog feature to share images of users that they were sharing of themselves, in addition to quotes from journalistic writing and a selection of videos from a project called Your Stories, where queer people tell stories related to their gender or sexuality.

I considered a few different concepts for laying out the site (Figure 2): using a grid which would flow the contents into columns, one which would flow the contents into columns and then into uneven rows, allowing more whitespace to better lead the eye around the page, and one which would crop entries into nearly square shapes. I ultimately decided to create a Tumblr theme that *floated* each entry in CSS (Cascading Style Sheets, the computer language used to visually style a webpage), causing the entries to align with each other much like words on a page (see Appendix B). This allowed each entry to extend to its natural height and leave plenty of whitespace on the page, with the result of creating an interesting visual composition that the viewer would want to browse.

As the intended audience for the project was primarily people who felt neutral or ambivalent towards queer people or who took a conservative (that is, largely anti-queer) view of queer issues, it was important that the site not be too obviously about queer subjects when the user began to browse, as this could be off-putting, particularly to a conservative demographic. Thus entries as they appeared to the user would mostly need to conceal this fact until the user had browsed the site for a moment and could see the entries as part of a narrative that was primarily about people and secondarily about gender and sexuality.

Thus on first loading the page, the user sees images of Tumblr users, quotes from journalistic stories, and videos from the Your Stories project. When the user hovers with

the mouse cursor over an entry, they see the name of the person, a selection of personal attributes, and a set of icons (see Appendix B). In the initial prototype, the user could click each name to read more about each person at the entry's original source, which would load in the browser. The intention behind the list of attributes was to deemphasize each person's gender or sexuality initially while emphasizing other qualities. In some cases the user could click on a particular attribute to see all the entries that shared that attribute. This would allow a user to focus on attributes that interested them and thus to become more sympathetic to the people featured.

The icons served another purpose. It was essential for this project that users eventually understand that the ultimate message was about different gender identities and sexualities. Icons had the benefit of being vague about their meaning while still showing an obvious visual connection between the people in the entries. Icons thus would encourage the user to look for a connection in the entries after clicking through and viewing the original sources for each, and the user would thus come to understand the meaning of the project gradually.

An early concept for the icon system showed the icons separately from the subjects' other attributes and used color (Figure 3). This proved impractical to implement on Tumblr, so the icons were distinguished using patterns instead, and embedded in each entry's tags on Tumblr, along with each subject's other attributes.

Other elements of graphic design also played an important role in the website design. I selected bright colors to emphasize the positive message of the project. Color also helps the user distinguish the different components of each entry. The typeface I chose to use throughout the site is one I designed, called Rockhopper. It is a relatively

modern sans-serif typeface which underscores the youthful slant of the project and, as a newly designed typeface, adds a personal quality to the overall design.

After I built this initial prototype, I tested it with the student group I had contacted in the earlier stage of the project. Some issues with the site were discussed and improved upon (see Appendix C).

A major usability issue that was uncovered in this testing session was that users did not know to click on the names of the people in the entries, and wanted to click on the entry body. I therefore made it so that clicking anywhere on an entry block would take the user to the original source for the entry. The user would be aware that the entry could be clicked by the change in the cursor style and in the color of the border around the entry.

The student group also expressed a desire to see the site as a more educational project, for instance to see the different gender identities and sexualities of the site's subjects explained in some manner. It was also suggested that a legend to explain the icons could be helpful. While delving into education would have somewhat derailed the purpose of the site, a legend was implemented. Users could access this by clicking a small question mark next to the website's title in the lower-left corner of the page, deliberately placed there as to not be too obvious, following the previously mentioned requirement that users not perceive the site's sexuality- and gender-related subject matter too quickly.

The final stage of Phase Two was the testing of the existing website with an unacquainted audience/user base.

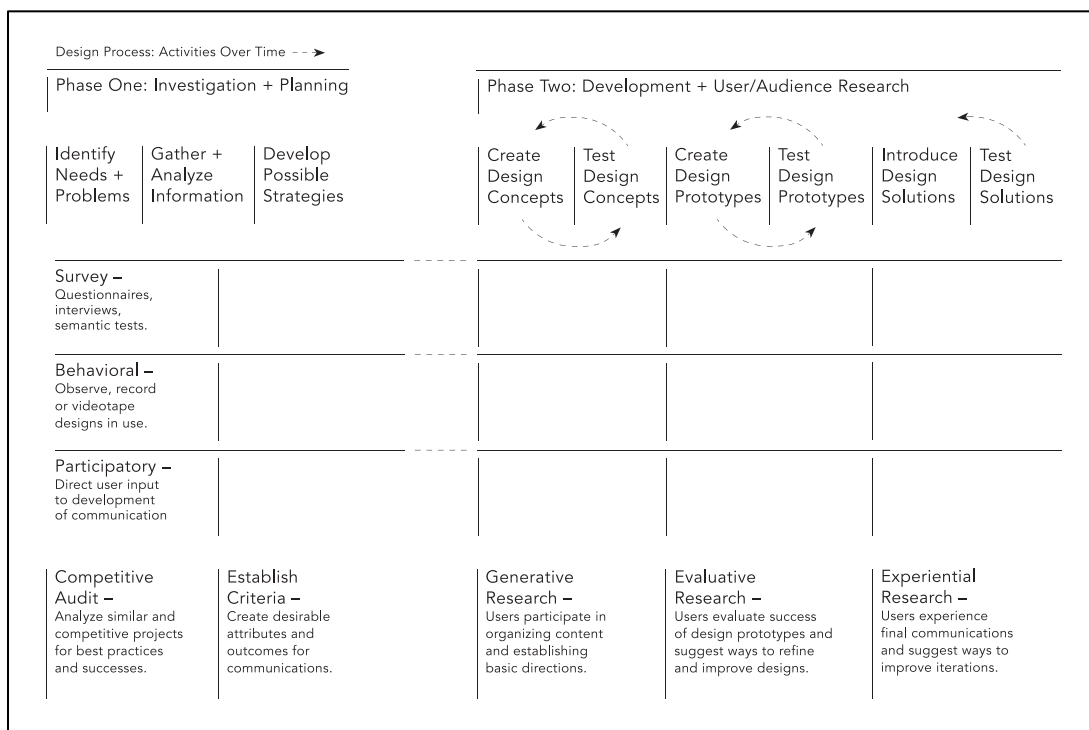


Figure 1. Chart of Paul Nini's design methodology.

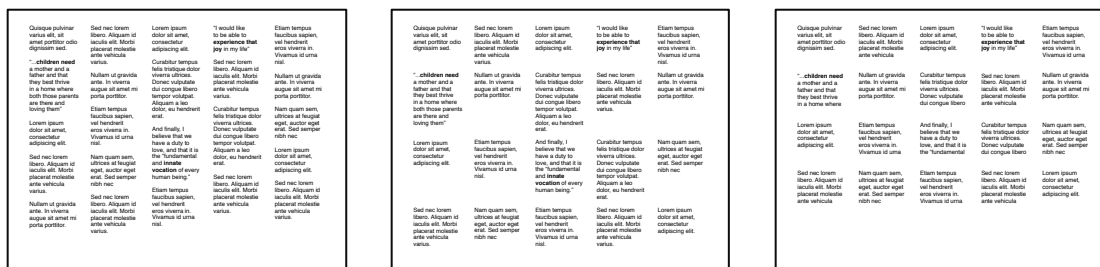


Figure 2. Three initial layout concepts.

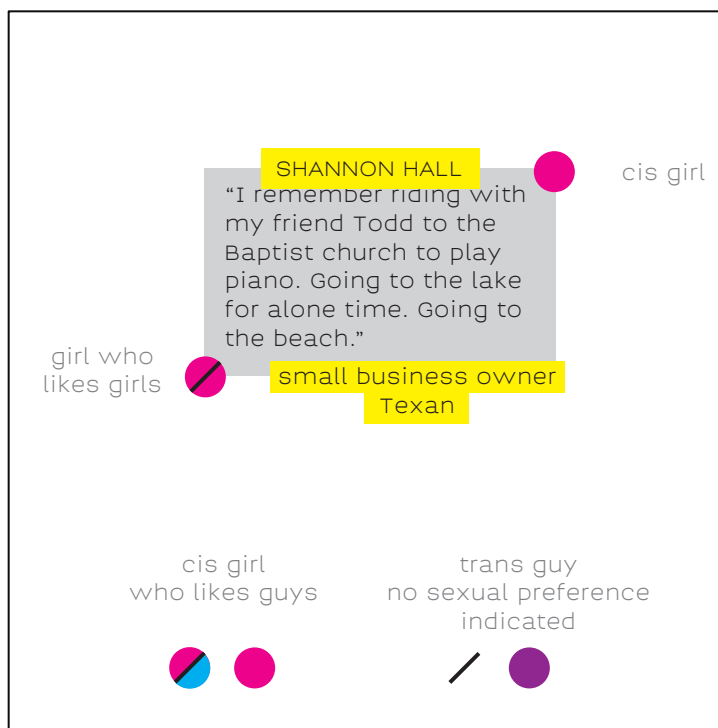


Figure 3. Initial concept for icon system.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

I tested the website in public, with passersby being asked to browse the site (see Appendix E) and answer a questionnaire about it (see Appendix D). I received ten usable responses. Users were first asked to complete sheet 1 of the questionnaire, which asked one question about “political beliefs.” Two users self-identified as “very or radically liberal”; five selected “mostly liberal”; one selected “moderate or centrist”; and two selected “I’m not sure” (see Table 1).

After answering question 1, users were asked to browse the website for four minutes. Two users had no interest in proceeding after three minutes; one user appeared to want to keep browsing after four. (One user went untimed, but the time was still around four minutes.) Users then proceeded with the questionnaire.

Responses to question 3 (see Table 2), asking the user to rate usability, generally fell between “easy and straightforward” and the midpoint between “easy” and “difficult,” with only one user rating the site closer to “difficult or confusing.”

Users only somewhat noticed the icon system on the site. Two users indicated some definite understanding of the meaning of the icons, with one user pointing out that they used the legend provided. Another user stated guesses that had to do with marital status as well as sexual orientation. Two expressly indicated that they didn’t notice the icons on the site.

Seven users indicated in question 2 that they had some idea of the subject matter of the project, making some mention of sexual orientation or gender identity. Two users indicated this elsewhere in the questionnaire. All users answered “yes” to question 7, indicating they knew someone who “is gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender, or who otherwise doesn’t identify themselves as straight or cisgender.”

Responding to question 6, users generally indicated that they did not “reconsider the way [they] thought about people of different gender identities or sexual orientations.” Only one user stated they “didn’t have time to get a full grasp.” Users generally stated that they did not need to reconsider anything: one user mentioned they were not “judgmental of these individuals”; another stated they “don’t really think about gender identity when dealing with people, other than to figure out their preferred pronoun.”

This may indicate a failing in question 6 itself. It was difficult to engage users without taking too much of their time, and so question 6 was meant to determine whether there was any immediate reaction after browsing the site. There may be a kind of reactive element in these responses. The question may have implied to the respondent that they needed to change, causing discomfort and forcing a slightly evasive answer, rather than having them deeply engage the issue.

On the other hand, positive remarks were sometimes included in the responses to question 6, with one user stating that “this site is a great thing.” In question 5 (see Table 3), six users selected “Enjoyed it”; six selected “Cool”; four selected “Encouraging”; and two selected “Fun.” No user selected “Disliked it,” “Boring,” or “Troubling.” One selected “Confusing,” writing in, “a little bit.”

Thus even as users reported that the site didn't change their minds, they did largely recognize the meaning of the site and generally reported positive feelings. This could point to successes in the graphic design and in the selection of entries. With deeper questionnaires or interviewing of users, the results could be different.

Future research. There are further considerations for future research that stem from limitations within this project. The website design does not take accessibility for unsighted users into consideration, and the site's grid-based layout and hover-based interactivity would be impossible to duplicate on smaller touch-interface devices such as smartphones. The site's design was only tested for one web browser, Apple's Safari browser on their OS X operating system; more extensive testing in other browsers would be necessary for a wider, more public deployment of the website.

Furthermore, the project was not tested with an audience that self-identified as politically conservative. As US conservatism is more strongly identified with anti-gay sentiment than are other US political persuasions, such testing would have provided a clearer idea of the project's effects on a less professedly queer-friendly sample.

Allowing for submitted entries on the site, as suggested by the student group I consulted, would likely yield a more fitting end product: entries on the site would be more specifically relevant to the site's message if they were made with that message in mind from the start. Submissions could also bring about extended user and audience engagement by allowing queer users of the site to actively participate in crafting the site's message.

Similarly, it would be useful to compare the effectiveness of these nonfictional concepts with a fictional one: E-E programs and television more broadly make heavy use

of fictional depictions to ultimately shape viewers' ideas. The purpose of this site was to quickly disrupt dominant stereotypes which could be reinforced by television, but an alternate project could attempt to engross users in a narrative arc that they might be more willing to return to, which could allow for a deeper sympathy with characters.

That is outside the scope of the present project. The intention here was to facilitate an introduction to a diverse group of queer people and, much as a face-to-face meeting might do, inspire sympathy for and understanding of the lives of real people whose identities consist of more than sexuality and gender. The overwhelmingly positive response to the project's perceived messages, as well as the continued proliferation of projects like it, underscores the progress being made for queer people, even as much hard work remains to be done.

Table 1. Question 1 and responses from the user-testing questionnaire.							
Question 1: How would you describe your political beliefs?							
<i>very or radically liberal</i>	<i>mostly liberal</i>	<i>moderate or centrist</i>	<i>Mostly conservative</i>	<i>Very or radically conservative</i>	<i>I'm not sure</i>	<i>I'd rather not say</i>	<i>Other (please describe)</i>
2	5	1	0	0	2	0	0

Table 2. Question 3 and responses from the user-testing questionnaire.				
Question 3: How easy is it to browse this site?				
<i>(1) Easy and straightforward</i>	<i>(2)</i>	<i>(3)</i>	<i>(4)</i>	<i>(5) Difficult or confusing</i>
4	1	4	1	0

Table 3. Question 5 and responses from the user-testing questionnaire.			
Question 5: What did you think about what you saw or read on the site?			
<i>Enjoyed it</i>	6	<i>Disliked it</i>	0
<i>Fun</i>	2	<i>Cool</i>	6
<i>Boring</i>	0	<i>Troubling</i>	0
<i>Encouraging</i>	4	<i>Confusing</i>	1

APPENDIX A

STUDENT GROUP SURVEY

the internet and social change
for people of diverse gender identities
and sexual identities

Researcher **David Amrock**
davidamrock.com/thesis

SURVEY

Thanks for taking the time to fill out this survey. There are 20 questions. No personally identifying information will be published with this research.
If you are accessing this survey on a computer, you can use the computer to input your answers and then save and send the file.

1 **This survey is intended for people who live in the United States. Where in the US have you spent the most time in the last 5 years?**

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Northeast | <input type="checkbox"/> South |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Midwest | <input type="checkbox"/> West |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I'm not in the US now, but I've spent at least a year there before. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I've never spent a year or more in the US. | |

2 **Your age?**

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> under 21 | <input type="checkbox"/> 21-30 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 31-40 | <input type="checkbox"/> 41-50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 51-60 | <input type="checkbox"/> over 60 |

3 **Your race?**

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> White or Caucasian | <input type="checkbox"/> Black or African-American |
| <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian or Alaska Native | <input type="checkbox"/> Asian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): |
| | <input type="text"/> |

4 **If any of these gender identity labels is one you use for yourself, please select it.** (Cisgender means not transgender.)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cisgender female | <input type="checkbox"/> Cisgender male |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transgender female (MTF) | <input type="checkbox"/> Transgender male (FTM) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Genderqueer | <input type="checkbox"/> Pangender |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure, or questioning | <input type="checkbox"/> None of these |

5 **Please describe your sexuality or sexual orientation.**

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Heterosexual | <input type="checkbox"/> Homosexual |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bisexual | <input type="checkbox"/> Pansexual |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure, or questioning | <input type="checkbox"/> None of these |

6 **Do you identify as Two-Spirit?**

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure | |

7 **Do you identify as queer?**

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure | |

8 **Do you identify as polyamorous?**

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not sure | |

9 **If you feel the above responses do not adequately allow for a description of your gender identity or sexuality, please explain:**

10 **Are you out, or are you open about your gender and sexuality, to your family?**

☐

Yes, I am out to most or all of my family.

☐

No, I'm only out to a few people, or I'm not out at all to my family.

☐

It varies, or I'm somewhere in the middle.

11 **Are you out, or are you open about your gender and sexuality, to your friends?**

☐

Yes, I am out to most or all of my friends.

☐

No, I'm only out to a few friends, or I'm not out at all to my friends.

☐

It varies, or I'm somewhere in the middle.

12 **Are you out, or are you open about your gender and sexuality, at school/work?**

☐

Yes, I am out to most or all of my co-workers, classmates, etc.

☐

No, I'm only out to a few people, or I'm not out at all to people I work or study with.

☐

I'm generally or totally out at school, not at work.

☐

I'm generally or totally out at work, not at school.

13 **Do you use the internet to discuss your gender and/or sexuality?**

☐

Frequently.

☐

Once in a while.

☐

Very rarely.

☐

Never.

14 **Do you feel more comfortable talking about your gender and/or sexuality online than in real life?**

☐

I feel more comfortable online.

☐

I feel more comfortable in real life.

☐

I'm neutral about it.

- 15 **Has the internet ever helped you come out, either to a friend or to a stranger? This could be in a blog post, on Facebook, wherever.** (If coming out has no relevance to you, has the internet ever helped you to be more open about your gender or your sexuality?)

☐

Once or twice.

☐

It has helped a number of times.

☐

No, never.

- 16 **Do you like to write online or blog about (check all that apply):**

☐

Your gender?

☐

Your sexuality?

☐

Other interests?

- 17 **Do you like to video-blog about (check all that apply):**

☐

Your gender?

☐

Your sexuality?

☐

Other interests?

- 18 **Do you post any other kind of media or art online about (check all that apply):**

☐

Your gender?

☐

Your sexuality?

☐

Other interests?

- 19 **Check any online services you use in which you present or discuss (at all) your gender or sexuality:**

☐

Facebook

☐

Twitter

☐

Tumblr

☐

LiveJournal

☐

deviantART

☐

personal website or blog (includes Blogger, WordPress.com, etc)

☐

message board

☐

other (please specify):

20

What do you think about the quality of media representations (on TV, in movies, in the news) of people with your gender identity or sexuality?

☐

I see mainly good portrayals: I feel people like me are accurately represented.

☐

I see mainly poor portrayals: I feel people like me are unfairly represented.

☐

I see a mix of good and poor portrayals.

☐

Not applicable: I don't see people like me in the media.

☐

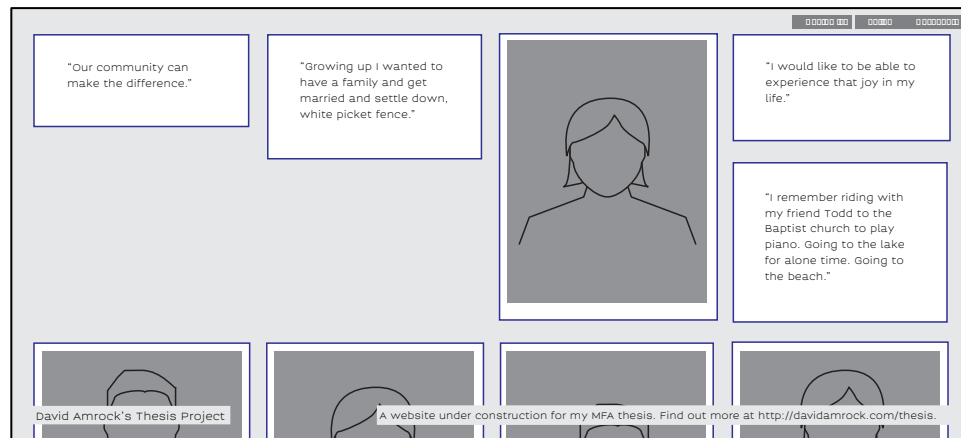
I don't know.

That's all. Thanks again!

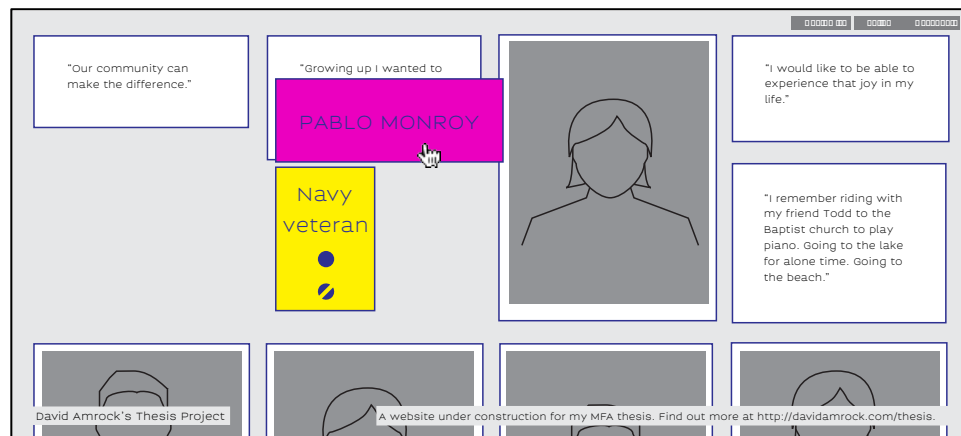
Follow the project at davidamrock.com/thesis

APPENDIX B

INITIAL SITE LAYOUT AND FUNCTIONALITY (ILLUSTRATED)



Grid of entries. (In this and all later figures, generic illustrations replace photos of people that appeared on the website.)



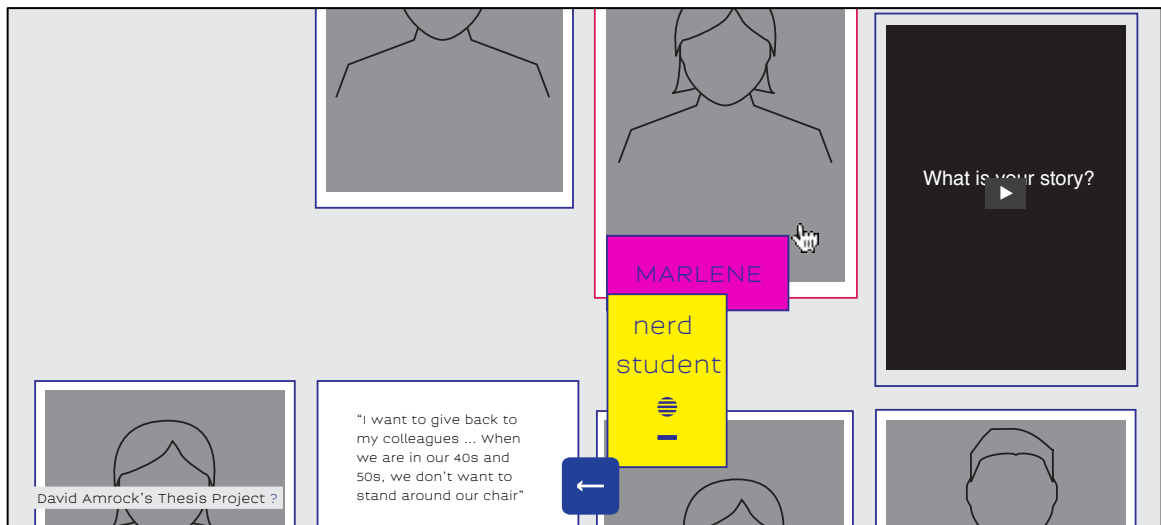
Hovering over an entry.



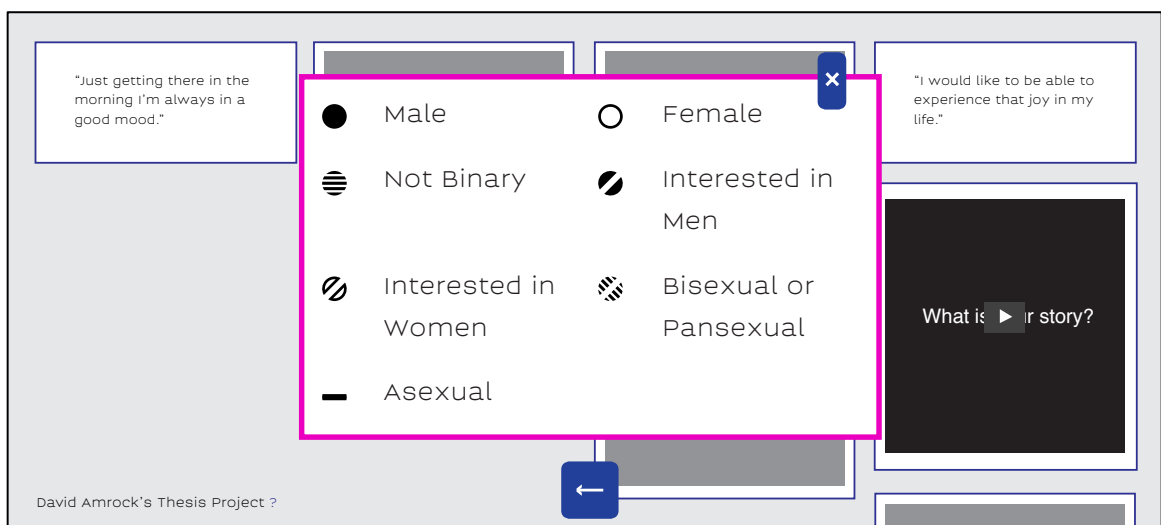
Scrolling down.

APPENDIX C

CHANGES MADE FOLLOWING STUDENT GROUP TESTING (ILLUSTRATED)



New appearance of hover state for entries (note the entry's reddish border).



Icon legend.

APPENDIX D

USER/AUDIENCE TESTING QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTION SHEET 1/3

1 How would you describe your political beliefs?

- ☐ very or radically liberal
- ☐ mostly liberal
- ☐ moderate or centrist
- ☐ mostly conservative
- ☐ very or radically conservative
- ☐ I'm not sure.
- ☐ I'd rather not say.
- ☐ other (please describe)

David Amrock's Thesis

QUESTION SHEET 2/3

- 2 Can you tell (or can you guess) what this project is about? What makes you say so?

- 3 How easy is it to browse this site?

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

easy and straightforward difficult or confusing

- 4 Did you notice the use of these icons or symbols on the site: ● ○ ≡ ↗ ↘ ↙ ↘ — and do you have a guess as to what they were meant to convey?

- 5 What did you think about what you saw or read on the site? (Check all that apply.)

<input type="checkbox"/> Enjoyed it	<input type="checkbox"/> Disliked it
<input type="checkbox"/> Fun	<input type="checkbox"/> Cool
<input type="checkbox"/> Boring	<input type="checkbox"/> Troubling
<input type="checkbox"/> Encouraging	<input type="checkbox"/> Confusing

QUESTION SHEET 3/3

- 6 Has viewing this site made you reconsider the way you thought about people of different gender identities or sexual orientations? (If so, what did you reconsider?)

- 7 Do you know anyone who is gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender, or who otherwise doesn't identify themselves as straight or cisgender*?

☐ yes

☐ no

That's all!

Thank you so much for participating!



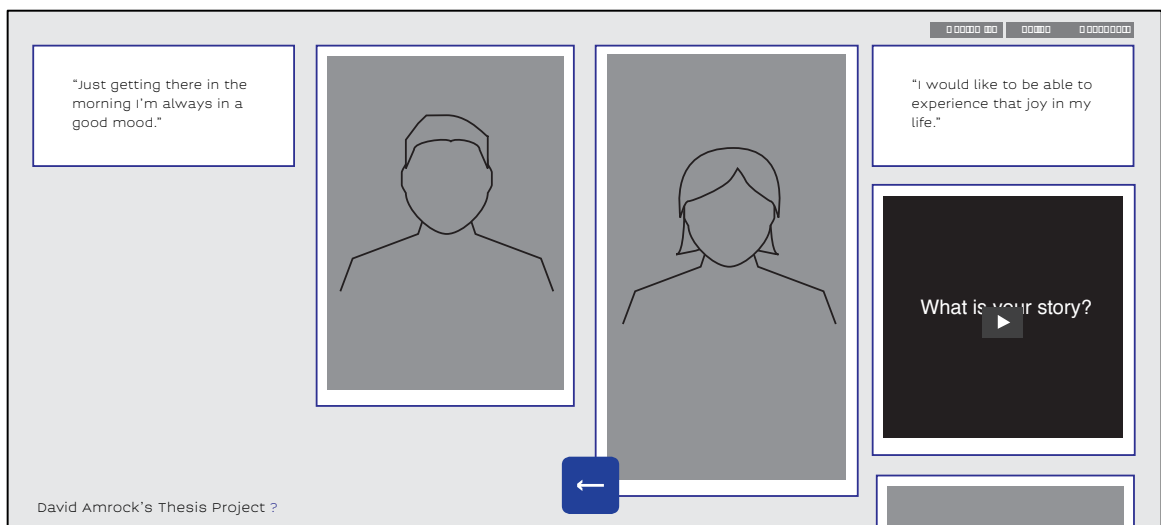
David Amrock

**cisgender is basically an antonym for transgender. Transgender people do not identify with the gender they were assumed to have at birth. Cisgender people do identify with the gender they were assumed to have at birth.*

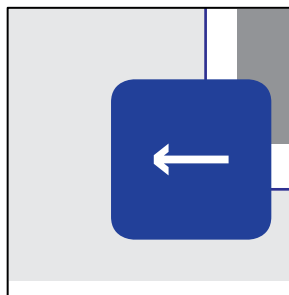
APPENDIX E

WALKTHROUGH OF COMPLETED SITE AS SEEN BY TEST USERS

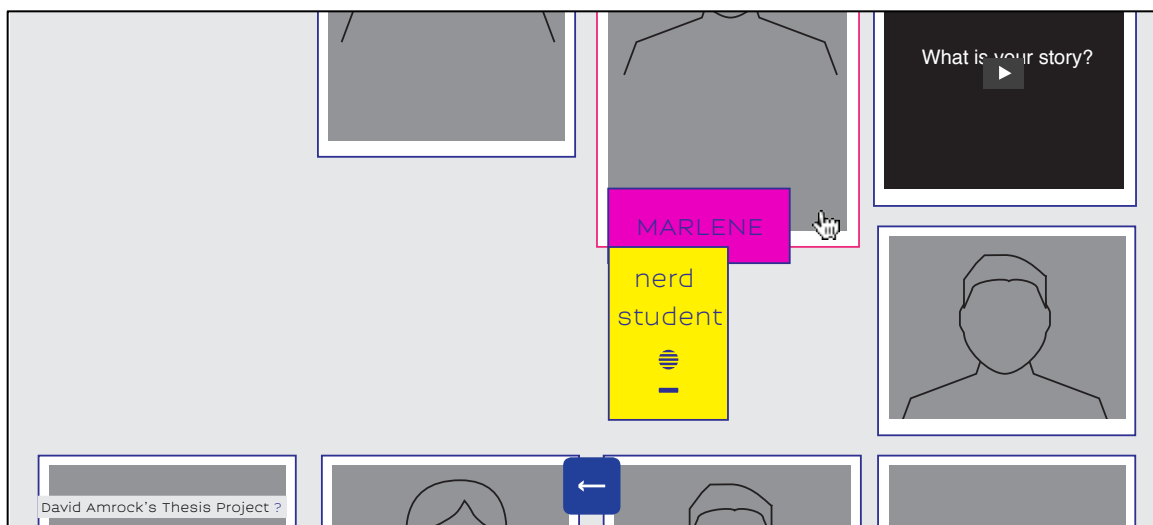
(ILLUSTRATED)



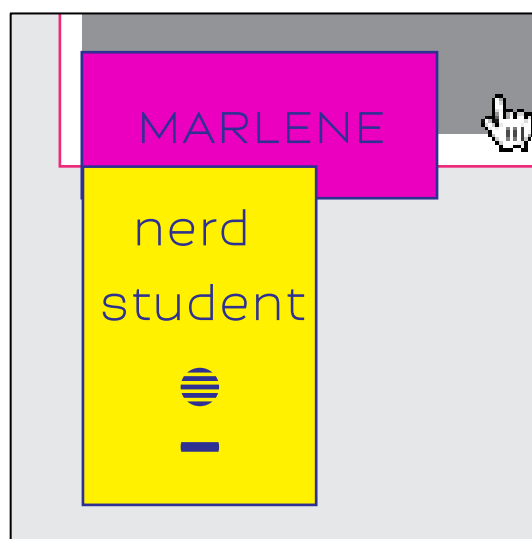
Initial site page.



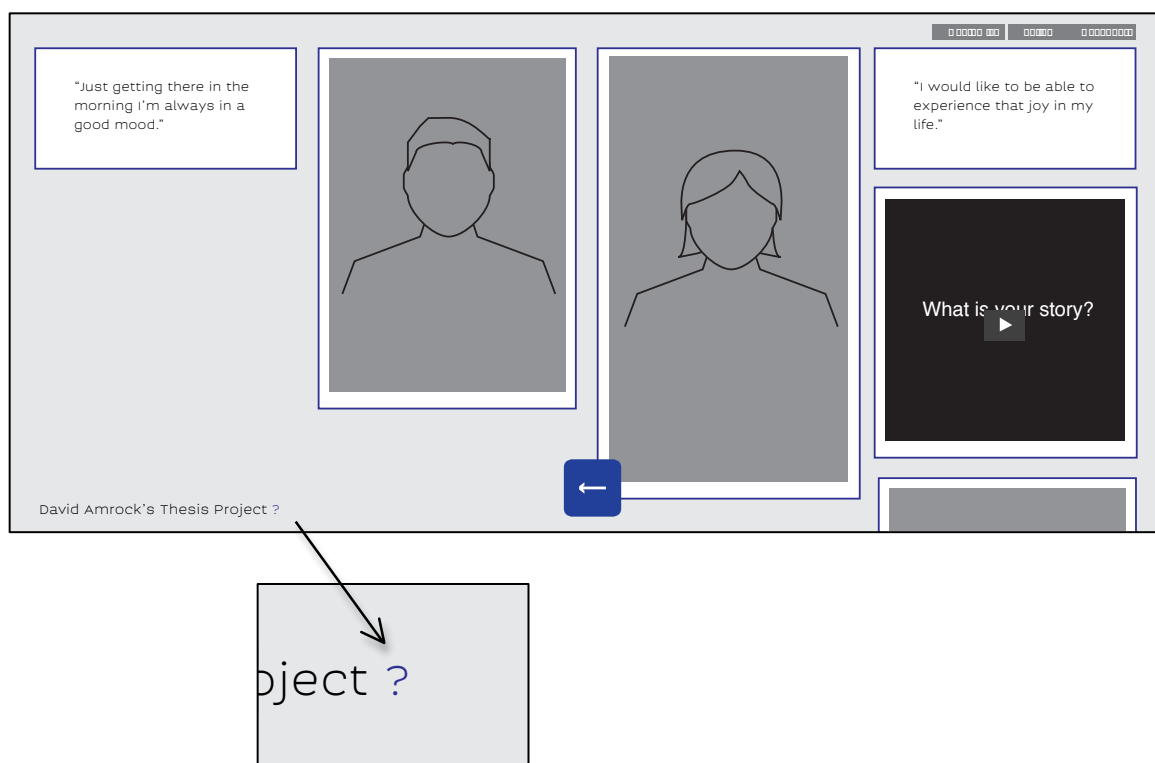
Detail of page navigation allowing the user to see older entries.



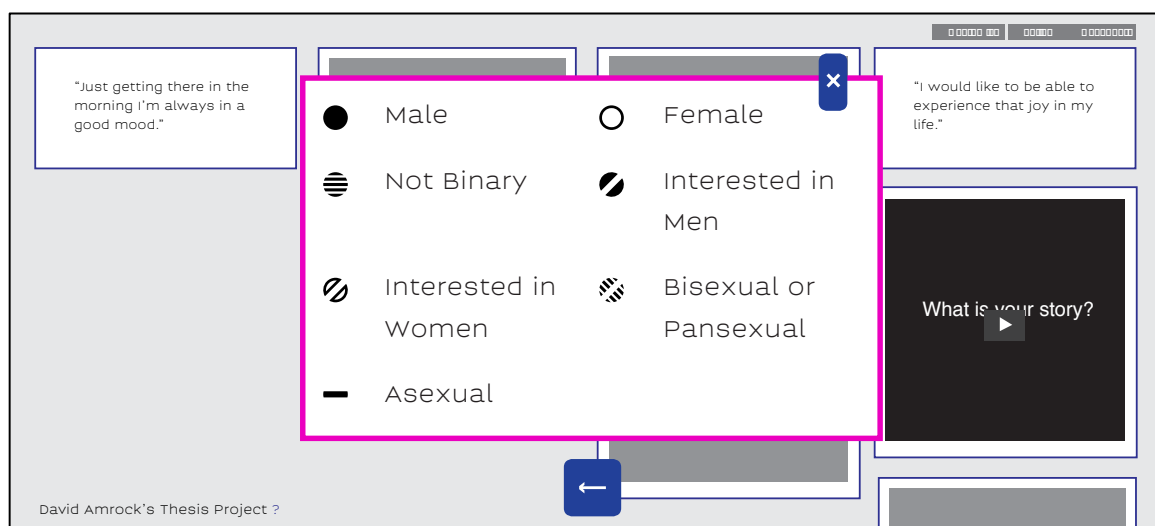
Hovering over an entry.



Detail of hovering over an entry, with name, attributes, and icons.



Screen with legend not showing, and detail of link to show legend.



Screen with legend showing.

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VITA

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This thesis was typed by David Amrock.