

INTRODUCTION AND THESIS STATEMENT

This project seeks to investigate the role of categories of difference in the Twitter self-representation of Stephen Fry as a male celebrity, focussing on gender, sexuality, and able-mindedness. By adopting an intersectional approach and by drawing on concepts from the fields of Masculinity and Critical Disability Studies, it examines attempts by Fry to reconcile his homosexuality and his mental impairment (bipolar disorder) with dominant discourses and representations of masculinity.

Thesis: Instead of conforming to dominant discourses and representations of masculinity, Fry uses his difference in order to fight marginalisation and to construct and perform new forms of masculinity.

Keywords: masculinity, able-mindedness, homosexuality, self-representation, Twitter

RELEVANCE OF THE PROJECT

- Potential contribution to the discussion of the representations of celebrity masculinity and the study of celebrity and social media

METHODOLOGY

- Corpus-based (corpus consisting of tweets and retweets published on the verified [@stephenfry](#) Twitter-account between 1st of February and 16 May 2021, the end of *Mental Health Awareness Week*)
- (Re)tweets in the corpus were categorised into (self-)promotion, self-representation, and “self-affirmation” (Murthy 32)
- Analysis of written and visual self-representation (see Rettberg)
- Method: close reading of (re)tweets in the light of the categories of difference (gender, sexuality, and able-mindedness)

TWITTER (CONTEXTUALISATION)

- “Microblog” (Java et al.; Murthy 9-11) → messages are limited to 280 characters (“Counting Characters”)
- Twitter communications are public (Murthy 2)
- According to Niedzviecki, Twitter users communicate with an (albeit virtual) audience (qtd. in Murthy 11-12)
- “Twitter suggests the possibility of interaction” (Marwick and boyd 144) (in the case of celebrity-audience interactions)
- Twitter interactions between celebrities and their audiences are marked by “power differentials” (see Marwick and boyd 144)
- Twitter can be used by celebrities and other public figures to “[manage] their public persona” (Turner 74)
- Content of (re)tweets can reflect interests of the celebrity and respond to audience (Marwick and boyd 147) → “affiliation” (147)

RELEVANT THEORETICAL CONCEPTS AND CONTEXTS

- Hegemonic masculinity and marginalised masculinities (Connell 129-35)
- Toxic masculinity (see Morgan; also Bola)
- Masculinity as unconscious learning process (Bola 15, 21)
- Performative and normative nature of masculinity (Bola 23)
- Plurality of masculinities (see Connell 129-30; Morgan; Bola 16)
- Potential stigmatization and marginalisation of homosexual men (see Bola 17) and of men suffering from a mental illness (Bola 34-39),
- Association of certain (male) mental impairments with weakness (Bola 37)
- Potential benefits of male celebrity health advocates in the destigmatisation process of mental illness (Bola 37; also Calhoun and Gold 238-39) → empowerment

FINDINGS

(I) Challenging Hegemonic Masculinity

- Neither explicit challenging of hegemonic masculinity nor criticism of contemporary discourses surrounding masculinity
- **However:** analysis reveals an **INDIRECT REJECTION** of hegemonic masculinity and the construction and performance of an alternative masculinity which is **NOT HETERONORMATIVE AND WHICH ACCOMMODATES MENTAL IMPAIRMENT**

(II) Construction and Performance of Alternative Masculinities

- **AFFILIATION WITH THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY (POTENTIAL FOLLOWERS)**
- Tweeting about talks/events/television series in which Fry makes an appearance (such as *It's A Sin*, *National Student Pride*, *Travel Gay* → see Fig. 3)
- In five instances: using visual clues (especially in shared content and retweets) such as the **RAINBOW/RAINBOW FLAG** (see Fig. 4)
- (Re)tweeting content by or concerning other famous gay celebrities and activists such as Russel T Davies or Peter Tatchell

AFFILIATION WITH THE MENTALLY-IMPAIRED (POTENTIAL FOLLOWERS)

- In two instances by using the pronoun ‘us’ (see Fig. 1) (see Marwick and boyd 147 on affiliation) → affiliation **less salient** than with LGBTQ+

→ Affiliations relate to marginalised groups

CELEBRITY ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM

- Express support for mental health awareness, gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights (see Fig. 2, 4), HIV awareness, and the fight against homophobia
- (Re)tweet content published by the NHS and charities such as *Rethink Your Mind*, *Just Like Us*, *Time to Change*, *BipolarUK*, and *Mind* (of which Fry is the current president; see “Our President”)
- Support campaigns such as the *Mental Health Awareness Week* (see Fig. 1)
- Some campaigns tweeted by Stephen Fry feature photos of or quotes by himself (see Fig. 4 → personal association with LGBTQ+ rights movement)
- Advocacy and activism are part of Fry’s masculinity → both can be seen as a **WAY OF FIGHTING STIGMATISATION AND MARGINALISATION AND OF INDIRECTLY CHALLENGING HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY**

(III) The Role of Class and Celebrity Status

- Cross and Walsh argue that celebrity status may be an asset for a celebrity suffering from mental illness (**reduced stigma**) (227-28) → “**power differentials**” (compare Marwick and boyd 144): some tweets in the corpus illustrate Fry’s celebrity status (role as guest speaker/award ceremony)

EXAMPLES FROM THE CORPUS



Fig. 1 Tweet 10 May 2021 at 12:21 p.m.



Fig. 2 Tweet 10 March 2021 at 9:08 a.m.

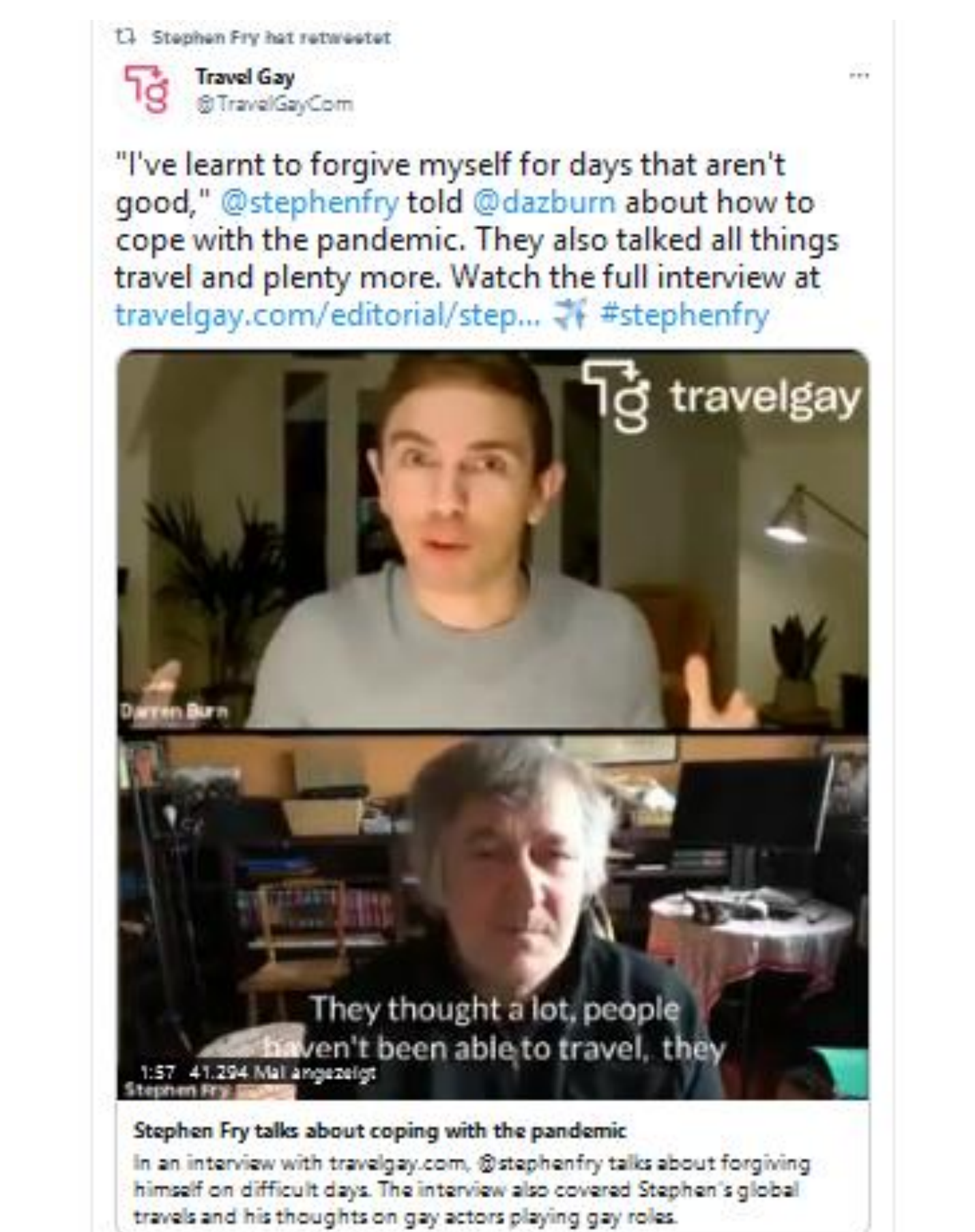


Fig. 3 Retweet 26 February 2021 at 8:30 a.m.



Fig. 4 Tweet 10 February 2021 at 12:00 a.m.

List of Works Cited

PRIMARY SOURCES (featuring on this poster)*

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