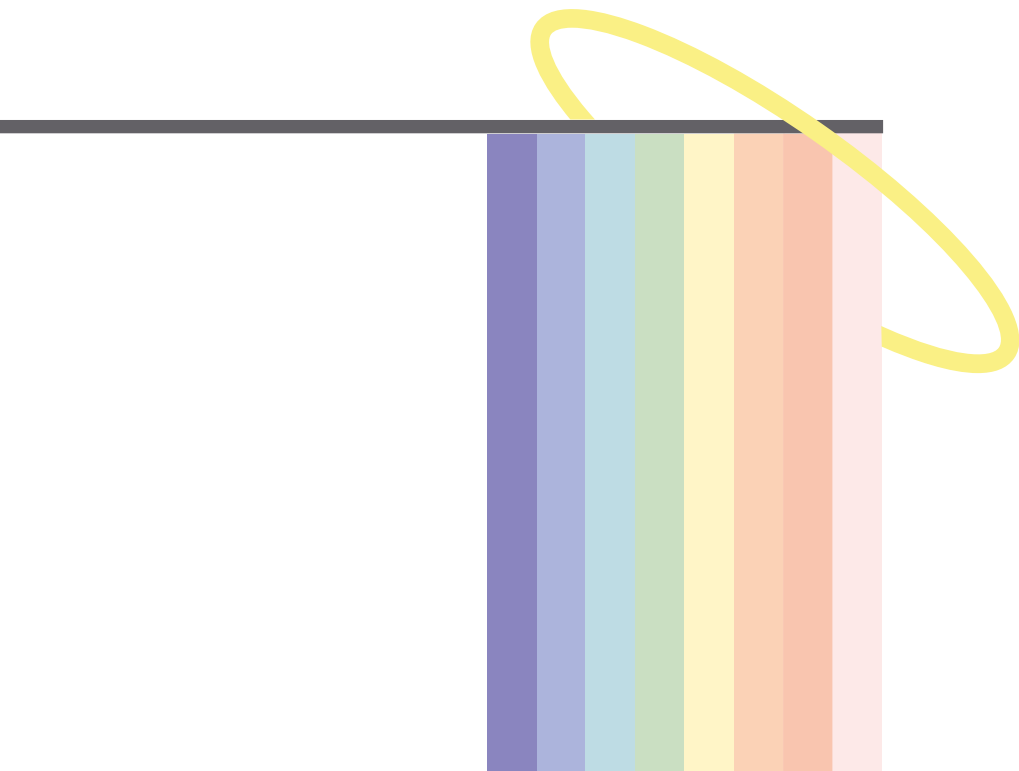


La Corrente

How can design support faith of
Catholic LGBT+ members in Italy?



Gandini Emanuele

La Corrente

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Catholic LGBT+ members in Italy?

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“Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.”

John 4:8

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Glossary

Faith

Faith is considered as the combination of Spirituality and Religion. Is the system of beliefs that people have regarding their connection with God.

Spirituality

The subjective experience of a positive relationship with God.

Big Sibling

Catholic members of the LGBT+ community, out of the closet, that were able to reconcile their sexuality with their relationship with God.

Coming out of the closet

To tell your family, friends, or the public that you are LGBT+, after previously keeping this secret (Cambridge Dictionary).

Religion

The identification in structured religious institutions with prescribed theology and rituals.

LGBT+

Acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and all the other identities in the spectrums of sexuality and gender.

Small Sibling

Catholic members of the LGBT+ community, in the closet, that are struggling in reconciling their sexuality with their relationship with God.

Being in the closet

Keeping your sexuality or gender identity secret.





Introduction

I have chosen to address this unconventional topic for many reasons. The first one, and probably the most important one, is because I have experienced this duality myself in the past. I have been through the process of re-conciliating my sexuality with my faith, and I know that the journey is difficult, but not impossible to accomplish. Therefore, I saw my experience as an opportunity to design something meaningful for people living in a similar situation.

Furthermore, I wanted to challenge myself with a graduation topic that demands a solid research phase, in which I could apply my research skills gained during these years to discover unobvious insights for designing an impactful solution. My master's program taught me how to manage complex contexts, therefore I wanted to work within an unusual context that, at first sight, has little to do with Design. Dealing with such a challenge was inspiring and motivating to me.

Having personal connections and knowing the situation would have helped me to look into the right direction and sense where to research to find opportunities for the chosen target group.

Eventually, I wanted my graduation topic to focus on rituals, as I have always found their impact on people's lives interesting, and I wanted to explore this field of design before finishing my studies. I have always been interested in how these activities, and the artifacts involved, were meaningful to societies and communities, therefore I wanted to explore this field and try to create a ritual myself.

I like to think this graduation project could push the borders of design a bit. Spirituality, faith, and religion are important aspects for many people's life, therefore I think design could start explored these fields more since they are important aspects of people's overall well-being.

Project summary

The presented work was developed as a graduation project for the Design for Interaction Master's program at TUDelft. During 100 working days, the designer had to develop a solution for a problem, and demonstrate the knowledge learned during his studies.

This project aims to design an opportunity for helping Catholic LGBT+ members to merge their faith with their sexuality harmoniously. To tackle this complex issue, **a detailed research phase was necessary.**

The desk research analyzed the current situation of Catholic LGBT+ members in Italy. In particular, the research focused on the current position of the Roman Catholic Church, and how this influences the target group's wellbeing. It has been analyzed the concept of spiritual abuse, how it influences Catholic LGBT+ members' internalized homophobia and the consequences of these behaviors on the target group's faith. Furthermore, this chapter determined how faith is connected with spirituality and religion.

All these data created the base for the research in Italy.

The primary research investigated the experiences of Catholics LGBT+ members in the context. Its analysis created different persona profiles within the target group and summarized different dilemmas they experience or have experienced. These were used to decide a more specific direction for the following stages.

At the end of the analysis phase, the project had a specific direction:

Switch perspective of SMALL SIBLINGS from a

God that condemns homosexuality to a loving and accepting One by nurturing

A feeling of guidance by building up a trustworthy connection with BIG SIBLINGS

A feeling of belonging by associating them with people alike

A feeling of hope by inspiring them by the experiences of BIG SIBLINGS

A feeling of protection by providing them a safe space to relate with BIG SIBLINGS

To help the designer achieve this, an interaction vision has been created, both to inspire the idea generation phase and to produce a method to test the final solution. During this stage, the outcomes from two different ideation sessions have been used to create possible design directions to match the design goal.

Eventually, it has been decided to develop a digital service combined with a ritual: "La Corrente".

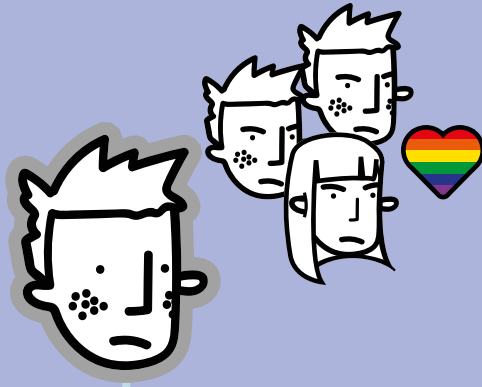
The solution booster personal reflections of Small Siblings by providing them space to interact with Big Siblings and to question negative beliefs they have towards their sexuality and their faith. In the designed scenario, "La Corrente" is downloaded from "La Tenda di Gionata", one of the main websites that Catholic Homosexuals use as a reference. After the download, they get assigned to a Big Sibling based on personal information and time availability. When the time for the conversation comes, the Small Sibling starts the conversation by sending an audio

message to answer to the question "Why do I think God loves me less as an LGBT+ member?". Big Siblings will reply with video messages in which they share a similar experience related to that topic. After this conversation, Big Siblings provides material to Small Siblings for reinforcing personal reflections. Small Siblings will perform the ritual of "La Corrente" every time a negative thought has been changed.

Three couples tested the solution. Their experience of "La Corrente" was positive, and their feedbacks were analyzed to understand how to develop the project further.

The final part of this thesis presents the reflections of the designer. This part discusses the most important topics and aspects regarding the overall process.

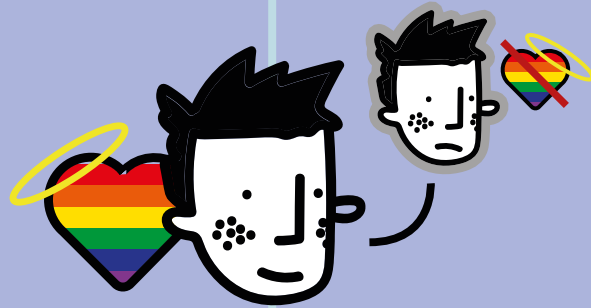
Process overview



DESK RESEARCH

Results

- Spiritual Bullying
- Internalized Homophobia
- Faith, Religion, spirituality



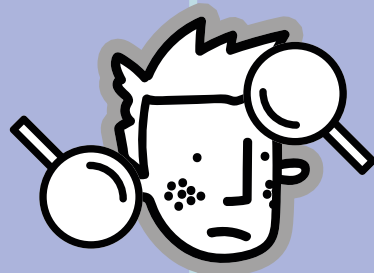
PRIMARY RESEARCH

Activities

- Focus groups
- Interviews

Results

- Personal Experiences
- Importance of Community
- Importance of Reflections
- Faith, not only Spirituality



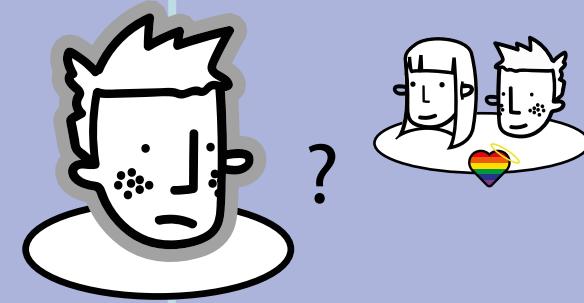
ANALYSIS PHASE

Activities

- Clustering findings and insights

Results

- Profiles and Personas
- Creation of Dilemmas



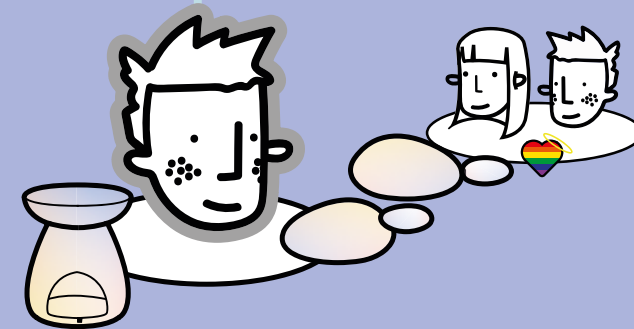
IDEATION PHASE

Activities

- Design Goal
- Interaction Vision
- Generative sessions

Results

- Connecting Small Brothers with Big Brothers
- Focus on empathy
- Focus on reflections



CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

Activities

- Focus groups
- UX tests
- First use scenario
- Evaluation in the context

Results

- Empathy through personal experiences
- Digital application development
- Ritual development



PROJECT METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents an **overview of the methodologies used in the process**. It will explain the reason why these have been adopted, and in which specific phases they were used.

To face the complexity of the context, a combination between the “**Double diamond approach**”, “**Design for dilemmas**” and “**Design for rituals**” was applied.

The first method created a solid base of the process, while the others guided the designer during the research analysis and the idea generation phase.

Methodology

During this project, different methodologies were adopted to create a solid process. Here, it is important to mention the “**Double diamond approach**”, “**Design for dilemmas**” and “**Design for rituals**”.

First, the overall process has been structured according to the “**Double diamond approach**” (Appendix B). The method offers a linear approach based on alternating explorations of the context and evaluations of data. This method was familiar to the designer, thus it was the best option to create a **solid base to work in a complex context**.

Between the “define” and “develop” phase, the “**Design for dilemmas**” approach was used (Appendix C). Because important conflicting concerns of Catholic LGBT+ members were discovered, the “design for dilemmas” approach was applied to look at these findings with a critical and analytical point of view and create a **valid starting point for the idea generation phase**.

Eventually, it has been incorporated in the “develop” phase the guidelines for “**Design for rituals**” (Appendix D). Because of the nature of this project, it was necessary to investigate how to **design solutions embedded with spirituality**, thus rituals. Besides, rituals are one of the most relevant design solutions to boost personal behavioral change. In addition to motivation, ability, triggers, and feedback loops, rituals are filled in with a meaning for the performers (Ozenc, 2016). Therefore, by performing a ritual, **people believe in the purpose of their actions and give special significance to that moment of their life**.

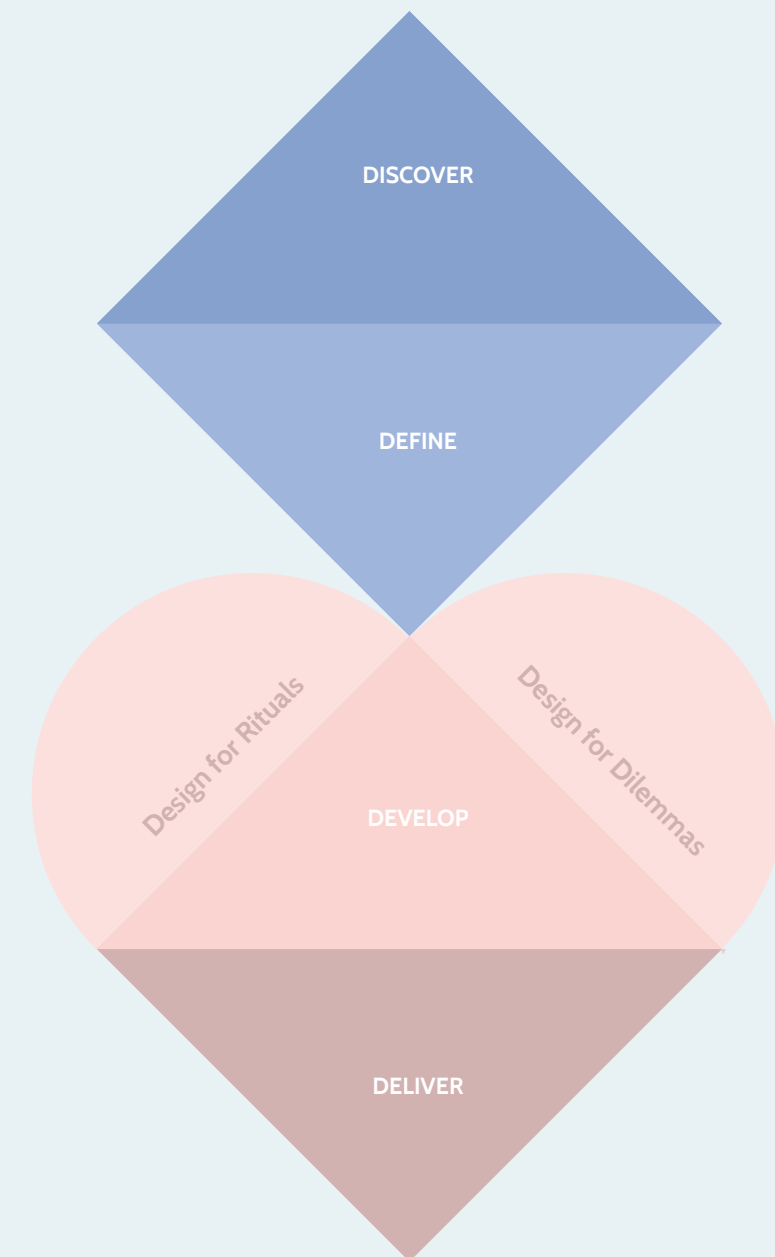


Figure 1
Combination of “Double diamond approach”, “Design for Dilemmas” and “Design for Rituals”



LITERATURE RESEARCH

This chapter presents the **information gathered from literature research**. The study reports the main issues that Catholic members of the LGBT+ community experience in combining their nature with their sexuality.

These pages describe the **effects that the Roman Catholic Church has on Catholic LGBT+ member's mental health, and how the exclusion from their community affects their overall wellbeing**. Furthermore, it describes how **faith, spirituality and religion relate to each other**, and how this connection can support the target group's relationship with God.

The knowledge acquired from this study has been used later on to set up the activities for the primary research and the analysis in the context.

Religion and Homosexuality

Multiple studies emphasized how religions have a positive impact on mental wellbeing of people. As an example, the study conducted by Wong, Rew, and Slaikou (2006) showed that **nurturing religiosity and religious affiliation are two activities associated with positive mental health, that can boost happiness in young adults and adolescents.**

Another important contribution is provided by Sonja Lyubomirsky's research (2008). In her article, she explained how people benefit from belonging to a Church, temple or mosque for many reasons. The first is related to the personal sense of belonging to a community with common values. Indeed, these people have larger social networks and more friends because of the connections they made through religious services. The other important reason is the relationship with their god, which works as a source of comfort and, at the same time, increases self-esteem, feeling unconditionally valued, loved, and cared for.

However, there are some exceptions. **Some minorities don't fit in due to the rules and dogmas created by mainstream religions, and this causes them suffering and psychological distress. One of the biggest minorities that is affected is the LGBT+ community** (Dèttore., Petilli, & Flebus, 2014).

In the research conducted by Dèttore., Petilli, & Flebus it was uncovered that due to the negative and repulsion statements carried out from spokesmen of religions, **people who identify as not-heterosexual, and that want to nurture their religious belief, experience negative feelings, eventually impacting their overall psychological well being.**

Roman Catholic Church point of view

In today's society, **the Roman Catholic Church considers homosexuality as a behavior, or inclination, to condemn.**

In the official statements about the morality of the Catholic Church, homosexuality is always described as a sinful behavior. The Vatican, for example, issued a

statement in 1986 in which Pope Benedict the XVI, by then-Cardinal Ratzinger, used the terms **"objectively disoriented"** and **"inclined towards evil"** (Ratzinger 1986).

This happens because same-sex couples live outside the marriage and because with their union is not possible to procreate (Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede, 1986). Furthermore, the opinion about the immoral nature of homosexuality is also **based on specific passages of the Bible** (Good, D. J., 1997), **where homoeroticism is seen as "against nature"**.

Reyfan's and Moane's research (2014) collected several other statements of the Roman Catholic Church about this topic. The paper shows how people from this religious community affirm that **homosexuality is one of the main factors that lead people towards a propensity for morally evil, therefore the Roman Catholic Church supports the idea that being gay is wrong.**

This is supported by several other terms when referring to people who engage in not-heterosexual relationships such as **'evil', 'pervert' and 'unnatural'** (Catechismo della Chiesa cattolica: Compendio; 2005).

According to the doctrine of the Catholic Church, the only correct behavior for a homosexual consists of **avoiding any form of same-sex affection and sexual activity.**

This is the reason why the Catholic Church encourages **conversion therapy** (any of the several dangerous and discredited practices aimed at changing an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity) or **associations to support LGBT+ people in supporting their chastity.** In Italy, the main organization related to this is "Courage". The association promoted by the Catholic Roman Church aims to guide men and women with same-sex attractions in living a life of chastity in fellowship, truth, and love. John Harvey, the founder, saw homosexuality as pathological, and the approach is based on the alcoholics anonymous model: a 12-step program that's

meant to help gay people abstain from sex.

The Catechism of The Catholic Church, the book that contains all the rules and beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church, contains several parts regarding homosexuality. **In chapter 2357 homosexuality is described as a depravation, and since homosexual acts preclude pregracies, they must not be endorsed in any case.** Once again, the only way to conduct a Catholic behaviour for an homosexual is through **chastity and avoiding any kind of romantic same-sex relationship.** In the following lines, homosexuality is described as a state, therefore it cannot be changed by people's will. Thus, **homosexuality can not be considered a sin** per se, since it lack in awareness and consent. However, homosexual acts include willingness, and therefore are described as actions to avoid. Eventually, **the Catholic Catechism states that every sign of discrimination should be avoided towards homosexuals.**

Homophobia in Italy

As stated in the research conducted by Adamczyk & Pitt (2009), **religion plays an important role in society for understanding attitudes towards homosexuality.** LGBT+ people who grow up in a Catholic country, or with a culture based on traditional Catholics, face these comments often, and **Italy is one of the countries with the highest number of Practicing Catholics.**

Worldwide, homosexuality is becoming more accepted in most of the developed countries and according to the research conducted by OECD, Europe is going towards a more accepting point of view regarding the topic. However, the Italian population is divided on the topic.

As reported by the survey conducted by Pew Research in 2018, **Italy has the highest number in Europe of Practicing Christians (40%) and another 40% consider themselves Christians without attending ceremonies,** which means that homosexuality is perceived differently according to the religiousness of the person. Furthermore, the same research states that **only 44% of practicing Christians in Italy is in favor of same-sex marriage,** and the data retrieved from Eurispes displays similar information. **47,8% of Italians has a positive attitude towards same-sex marriage, while only 29%**

is positive to allow same-sex couples to adopt a child. The data informs that the Roman Church in Italy has a strong influence on social matters besides spirituality. Over 83% of atheists are in favor of same-sex unions, which can support the assumption that being Catholic means in most of the cases, being against homosexuality.

In the OECD research, acceptance of homosexuality was measured with a scale from one to ten, where one means that homosexuality is never appropriate and ten that is it always, the average was 4 between 1981-2000, while now it's over 5.

The research took into account three different kinds of religious people: Practicing Christians, Christians who don't go to church and atheists.

Italy, however, is one of the countries where homosexuality is less accepted, and the score of the conducted study was lower than in the past.

From the results, it has been discovered that these three groups have different points of view about social topics such as homosexuality.

Besides the religiousness of people, age and education were the dominant factors. Those who obtained a degree show higher levels of tolerance towards the LGBT+ community, while people who terminated education after middle school condemn homosexuals in most of the cases.

If we consider age, people aged between 15 and 29 appear to be more tolerant towards homosexuality, and people who live in urban areas are more open to the topic than those who live in the rural areas. **Because of the context, and because of the language the Church has used to describe homosexuality, people develop the perception that being homosexual is something bad, and therefore the Church has reasons to consider homosexuality is something to correct.** Therefore, embracing personal sexuality and nurturing Catholic beliefs is not possible since they are **mutually exclusive** (Dèttore et. al, 2014; Lease, & Noffsinger-Frazier, 2005).

Due to this misperception, **people develop internal conflicts related to accomplishing their needs as queer individuals and their need for faith.**

Internalized Homophobia

The internal conflict between faith and sexuality can boost a psychological condition already instilled in most of the members of the LGBT+ community defined as “**internalized homophobia**”.

It is possible to describe this term as the **negative attitude, which includes thoughts, behaviors, and beliefs, that LGBT+ people develop towards themselves and the LGBT+ community**. This adversity in the most severe cases may lead to serious psychological consequences such as a **rejection of personal sexuality and the rise of a desire of being heterosexual** (Frost, & Meyer, 2009).

In most of the cases, **individuals develop internal homophobia in an earlier stage of their life**, even before a full realization about their personal sexuality, since **negative opinions about the subject are instilled by society**.

As it has been explained before, it is common to get in contact with negative opinions about homosexuality, thus it is common to be considered internal homophobia as a **common step of LGBT+ members psychological development** (Dèttore et al., 2014).

As reported by Gonsiorek's research (1988), internal homophobia arises because we live in a society filled with heterosexual biases. Children who develop an awareness of being different in an early stage of their lives may not understand exactly the sexual nature of their differences, but they immediately learn that being homosexual is something negative. Once a full understanding of a not-heterosexual nature is gained, negative emotions about self-esteem arise, and so do different degrees of internalized homophobia.

The Rainbow Project, an Irish organization that aims to improve the physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing of LGBT+ people, asserts that internal homophobia may manifest in different forms such as:

- Rejection of your sexual orientation, with attempts to change it.

- Feeling you are never good enough and chasing under-achievement or even over-achievement as a source of acceptance.

- Low self-esteem, negative body image that may lead to eating disorders.

- Contempt for the LGBT community.

- Prejudice onto another target group.

- Attempts to pass as heterosexual

- Depression, that may lead to thinking or attempting suicide

- Constant self-monitoring of one's behaviors and actions

It has been shown that people belonging to religious organizations that promote negative opinions about the LGBT+ community experience a higher level of internal homophobia (Lease, & Noffsinger-Frazier, 2005).

Jeremy J. Gibbs' research (2015) on mental health, internal homophobia and religious belief highlight how important is nurturing a healthy relationship between one's sexuality and personal faith. His research took into consideration young adults and investigated the relationship between suicidal thoughts, internalized homophobia, and abandonment of personal religion.

The work discovered a connection between the factors, and uncovered that **abandoning personal religious beliefs reduce internalized homophobia, but, increase the risk of suicidal thoughts. This proves that rejecting personal religion is not the proper solution to achieve good mental health and to overcome the damages caused by internal homophobia.**

However, other research about internalized homophobia pointed out a different path for a healthier impact on LGBT+ community's mental health.

The research carried out by the psychologist Daniela Petrilli on internalized homophobia and its relationship with Catholicism in Italy has revealed that it is possible to live as a homosexual and still have faith in God.

According to her research, **the key to resolve the conflict between homosexuality and religion is to highlight the differences between spirituality and**

religion, research into the diversities between dogmas and personal beliefs, and contextualize the Bible in its historical period.

The hypothesis that the negative impact of religion on both spirituality and mental health is supported also by Sullivan-Blum's work (2004). In the research, it has been shown how important it is to separate religious teachings and spiritual beliefs. **Indeed, homosexuals can find relief in their faith only when they become capable to distinguish between religion and spirituality.**

The theory that spirituality can be separated from religion, and thus provide good mental health has been supported by a study conducted by Sonya Lyubomirsky. The research involved the analysis of a comparison between people with a strong sense of spirituality and those who only take part in religious organizations without developing personal connection with God.

It is registered that **people who nurture their spiritual beliefs have better mental health than those who don't, and that training personal spirituality has several psychological benefits that people who consider only as religious don't experience** (Lyubomirsky; 2007).

Faith, Religion and Spirituality

Having faith in a higher power is one of the most important aspects of many people's lives. By definition, faith is described as "a strong belief in the doctrines of a religion, based on spiritual conviction rather than proof." (Faith: Definition of Faith by Lexico)

Psychological research on happiness, such as that conducted by Sonja Lyubomirsky (2006), has proven that nurturing personal spiritual beliefs increase overall happiness and mental wellbeing. In particular, **training a connection with a higher power provides people with social support, deeper meaning in life and it increases meditative qualities.**

However, the terms and aspects that are involved when talking about a relationship with a "greater power" are not always clear and their differences are often fuzzy. **Faith, spirituality, and religion are ordinarily used as synonyms, but their true meaning is different** (Newman, 2004).

The first term, **faith**, is the most personal of the concepts. **It refers to all the beliefs that people have in terms of the meaning of their life and their spiritual conviction.** According to Fowler's definition (1986) faith involves the construction, maintenance, and transformation of the human purpose in life.

By definition, **spirituality is a subjective factor of a person's life.** Therefore, it has been always fuzzy to create a valid definition that could apply to all people. This fuzziness makes it difficult to highlight the differences from religiousness, thus it is needed to select a definition coming from the existing literature to have a clear definition of the terms.

For this case, we will merge Benner's definition (Benner, 1989) and Vaughan's (Vaughan, 1991). According to the first theorist, we can describe spirituality as "the human response to God's gracious call to a relationship with himself", while the second describes it as "a subjective experience of the sacred". For this project, we will describe spirituality as "**the subjective experience of a positive relationship with God**".

Religion, on the other hand, is the **set of rules practiced by a group of people having the same faith.** It is a collection of dogmas and doctrines that people need to follow to be a part of the chosen group.

Therefore, religiousness in this project will be considered as "**the identification in structured religious institutions with prescribed theology and rituals**" (Zinnbauer et al., 2015).

Newman's definition of religion (2004) describes it as "systems or constructions of specific practices related to a superhuman being".

In Catholicism, the terms refer to different aspects of the believer's life, however, some parts of them may overlap.

In the research conducted by Zinnbauer et al. (2015), the terms spirituality and religiousness were investigated. For the first term, most participants used references to a connection or relationship with a Higher Power and integration of values and beliefs with one's bwper experiential spiritual life. This negative opinion about religion encourages people to nurture a more personal form of spirituality, based on personal values, rules, and individual morality (Hill et al., 2000; Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999).

This creates a set of personal systems with personal rituals and ethical codes, or it keeps only selected parts of religious traditions according to personal preferences. Both of the two options have in common the fact that they provide freedom from external imposed religious laws (Exline, 2002).

From this analysis it is possible to infer that **despite spirituality and religion are two different aspects, some aspects may overlap and look similar.** Therefore, it is important to emphasize the personal aspect of spirituality and on the personal dialogue with God while designing for nurturing spirituality.

Newman presents a model to understand how these concepts are connected. From this model, two important takeaways can be obtained. **Religion and spirituality are by-products of personal faith, and subsequently, working on personal faith doesn't**

necessarily imply being religious and/or spiritual. Even though having both spiritual and religious components indicates a deeper faith development, **it is not necessary to develop both aspects to nurture personal faith.** Indeed, faith works as the leading source by which people are religious and spiritual, but at the same time, a person can be only religious or spiritual to nourish his/her faith. **The model demonstrates that it is possible to overcome the negative aspects of religion, such as negative opinions and spiritual abuse, and keep nurture personal faith in other ways and with different activities.**

This is important to the result of the project since it indicates that it is possible to nurture a positive connection with God without the support of a religious institution.

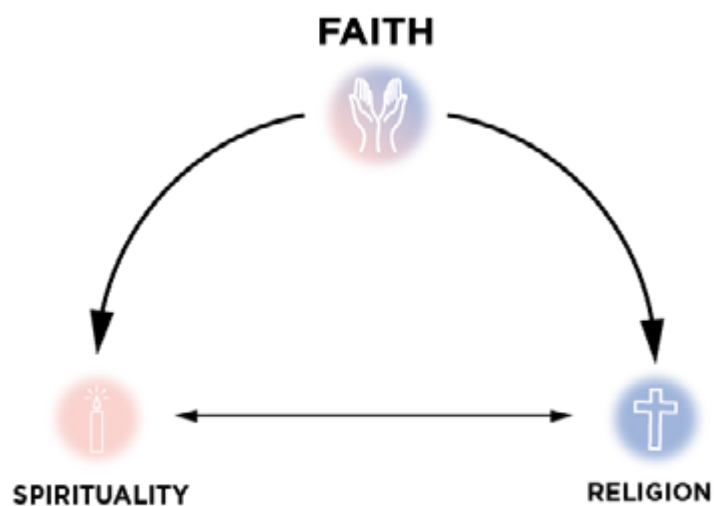


Figure 2
Newman's model that describes how faith-religion-spirituality are connected

Spiritual Abuse

One reason that pushes people away from organized religion can be the religious community itself. **People can be the target of judgment or even discrimination from members or leaders of the community, a problem often experienced by LGBT+ members called spiritual abuse** (Schuck, & Liddle, 2001).

According to Dr Lisa Oakley and Justing Humphreys, **spiritual abuse occurs in Christian communities by controlling people through the misuse of religious books and texts.**

It is possible to define the term religion abuse as a **“mistreatment of a person who needs help, support or spiritual empowerment, with the result of weakening, undermining or decreasing the one’s spirituality”** (Johnson, & van Vondeen, 1991). For people belonging to the LGBT+ community, it is common to experience this issue while taking part in liturgical celebrations of mainstream religions since, as we have seen before, homosexuality is condemned by mainstream religions. According to Ward’s research (2011) an LGBT+ member may face six different cases of abuse:

1. Leadership representing God
2. Spiritual bullying
3. Acceptance via performance
4. Spiritual Neglect
5. Expanding external-internal tension
6. A manifestation of internal states

1. Leadership representing God

The first category occurs when **the leadership of the religion expresses negative opinions towards the LGBT+ community.** Since the religious community perceives **the religious authority as the representation of God,** the members develop the idea that God hates LGBT+ members, **creating a sense of guilt and boosting negative opinions towards himself/herself.**

Questioning the leader means questioning God, therefore it means falling from grace. (Damiani, 2002)

2. Spiritual Bullying

This abuse refers to the situation **when religious leaders and/or peers bully or harass individuals with a not-heterosexual orientation to produce conformity in the religious community.** An example, in this case, is to blackmail someone on revealing his/her sexuality if this person doesn’t undertake a conversion therapy journey. **The leader is perceived as the infallible moral judge, therefore one’s morality is lost and reformed according to the group** (Damiani, 2002).

3. Acceptance via performance

This abuse influences the LGBT+ community members when, **because of the fear of being abandoned by their religion peers, they feel forced to practice their religion in forms that don’t fit their needs.** It is common for LGBT+ members that suffer from this kind of abuse to develop a sense of inadequacy and it may lead to a repression of sexual identities to being accepted by other worshippers.

4. Spiritual Neglect

This abuse occurs when religious leaders ignore people’s suffering and emotional pain. **Leaders may claim that these psychological problems arise because of sinful behaviors.** Since it is common for members of the LGBT+ community to experience depressive symptoms while trying to blend their sexual orientation and their religion, leaders see these as the **consequence of the sin of homosexuality.**

5. Expanding external-internal tension

While experiencing this abuse, LGBT+ members don’t express their true identity. **They feel the need for conformity with the rest of the religious community, which leads them to hide their true self.**

Homosexuals, in this case, may live a compartmentalized lifestyle, living both their sexual life and spiritual one, but not concurrently.

This unhealthy behavior can lead to emotional distress and other psychological problems.

6. The manifestation of internal states

This last problem is the manifestation of the other religious abuses on a physical and psychological level. In this case, **people manifest symptoms due to the**

bad experiences in religious environments such as stress, anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts.

As a consequence, LGBT+ members who experience these abuses develop issues related to their spiritual and religious belief, and in several cases, they feel the need to abandon their spiritual needs. According to Damiani’s research (2002), **spiritual abuse influence negatively both the psychological health of people and their spirituality.** On a spiritual level, the devotion to God is damaged, and loyalty is transferred to church leaders instead. People are afraid to leave the religious community for fear of losing one’s salvation, not because they truly believe in what is practiced there. **The person entered the religious group because he/she wanted to have a deeper connection with God, but eventually, this connection is depersonalized due to the experienced spiritual abuses.**

Based on this research, we can infer that mainstream religions, including Traditional Catholicism, may contain several behaviors that have a strong negative influence on LGBT+ people and that, ultimately, weaken homosexual’s spirituality.

Spiritual Struggles

Being able to separate personal spirituality and collective religion has been proven to be the main aspect to improve mental health of homosexuals and their connection with God.

Personal spirituality has been documented as a valuable source of well-being. However, it can also result as a bad influence and a source of stress and struggles. This is the case of spiritual struggles. Even though spiritual orientation that focuses only on positive aspects and emotions must be considered incomplete (Pargament et al., 2004), the effect of spiritual struggles also has an impact of people’s physical wellbeing. Research has highlighted that **spiritual struggles are connected with higher mortality rates in medically ill patients, and anger towards God has been connected with poorer recovery in rehabilitation settings, even with physical, psychological and social factors controlled.**

One of the most experienced spiritual struggles is anger towards God, a particular emotion that is common in the western world. According to psychology, it’s part of the human behavior while handling with suffering to conduct an attributional search. **This is a coping mechanism that aims to understand the reasons and the source of their difficulties** (Wong, & Weiner, 1981). In the case of people with a spiritual connection with God, He is the entity to blame because of their suffering.

Most of the believers experience mixed emotions while dealing with this kind of struggle. The most common ones are confusion and mistrust, and after those are followed by a conviction that God’s actions are unfair and wrong. This emotional response to suffering can cause problems related with mental health. moreover, frequent or unresolved anger towards God has been linked with low self esteem, depression and anxiety,

In addition to these effects, **anger towards God may lead to the abandoning of one’s personal faith.** Some studies were made to study this phenomenon more in detail.

According to (Exline & Bushman) there is a link between religiosity and less anger towards God. However, the same study highlights that this emotion may be covered by participants because in some religions expressing this feeling against God is considered morally wrong. This factor may have influenced people's responses and due to fact that is perceived as morally wrong, the emotion could be perceived but not reported.

In order to overcome this problem some guidelines were studied and some activities are suggested. **To overcome the problem, it is necessary to understand and communicate these negative emotions towards God.** It is possible to do so through activities such as praying, writing a letter to God or meditating. Furthermore, meditating on holy writings that deal with the same topic is also another important activity that is eventually beneficial for people who experience anger towards God. For people who experienced a long period of anger towards God, it is necessary to rebuild trust. In order to do so, praying and meditation on texts emphasizing positive attributes of God have been highlighted as valid tools.

As described in the research, it is also possible that **anger towards God functions as the tip of the iceberg, and that the real problem is not the emotion but the perceived disconnection and distance from God.** In this case, people experience distress related to the ineffectiveness of their actions directed at managing or coping with the problem.

One of the activities that are suggested in this case is to see praying as a two-way communication. The person is trained to speak with God like he/she is speaking with a friend, and to use imagery or reading of to sacred text to see the response of God.

Another option might be to strengthen the sense of belonging and connection with other members of own spiritual community, since this could create a sense of connection with God. It is also possible to have a period of distance to God and spirituality, reflecting on personal true values and reconnecting with a stronger faith after that period. For homosexuals, sexual identity is a catalyst that boosts spiritual

struggles. **Homosexuality is one of the main aspects for questioning and later on adjusting personal faith.**

In the the study made by Sherry et. al (2010), an analysis of homosexuals and their relationship with religion was made. The results indicated that the biggest number of people were able to merge these aspects by turning to religions that are more accepting towards homosexuality. **However, a considerable number of participants was able to merge these two aspects by embracing spirituality without needing to be associated with an organized religion.** Furthermore this group was also describing God as a loving and accepting being, opposite to a judgemental one commonly perceived in mainstream religions.

Nurturing personal spirituality becomes one of the main solutions to reduce the negative impact of mainstream religions. These people experience the set of rules imposed by religions to block their personal or experiential spiritual life. This negative view about religion, pushes people to nurture a more personal form of spirituality, based on personal values, rules, and morality. **This creates a set of personal systems with personal rituals and ethical codes, or it keeps only selected parts of religious traditions according to personal preferences.** Both the two options have in common that they provide freedom from external imposed religious laws.



Framework form literature research

From the literature research it is possible to create a model that illustrates the current situation of Catholic Homosexuals. As mentioned before, Faith is constituted by Spirituality and Religion. Both of the two aspects should positively influence the faith of the believer, but in the case of Homosexuals this is not happening. Due to the spiritual abuse that comes from the institution of the Roman Catholic Church,

faith of LGBT+ Catholics is affected negatively and this causes suffering and distress. However, it is possible to overcome or reduce this problem by focusing on Spirituality by switching the point of view towards a more intimate and personal relationship with God, moving away from the dogmas and judgement of the Church.

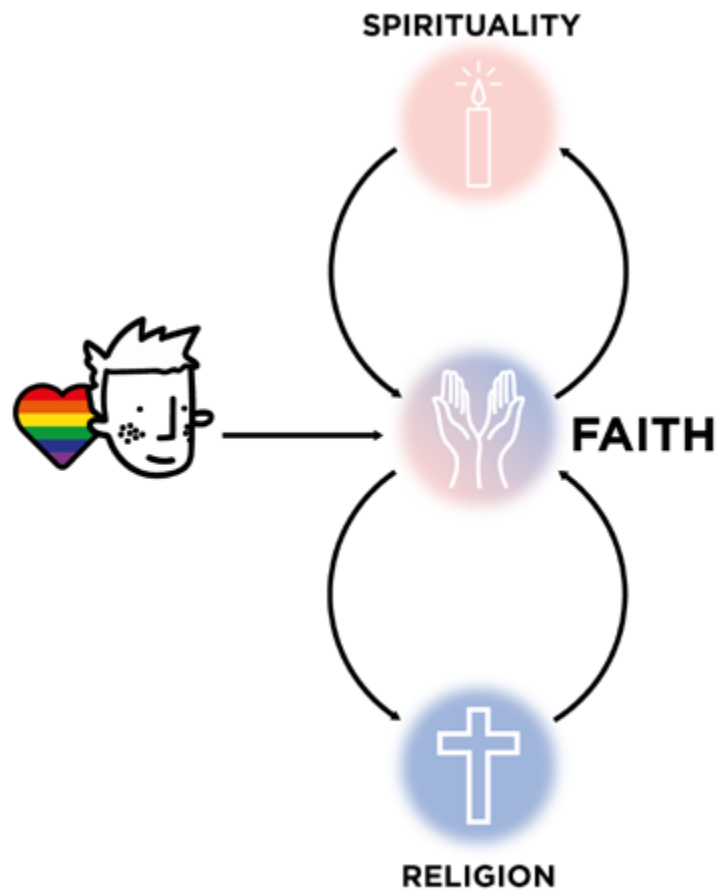


Figure 3
Based on Newman's model, the ideal situation for Catholic LGBT+ members' faith should be a balance between religion and spirituality.

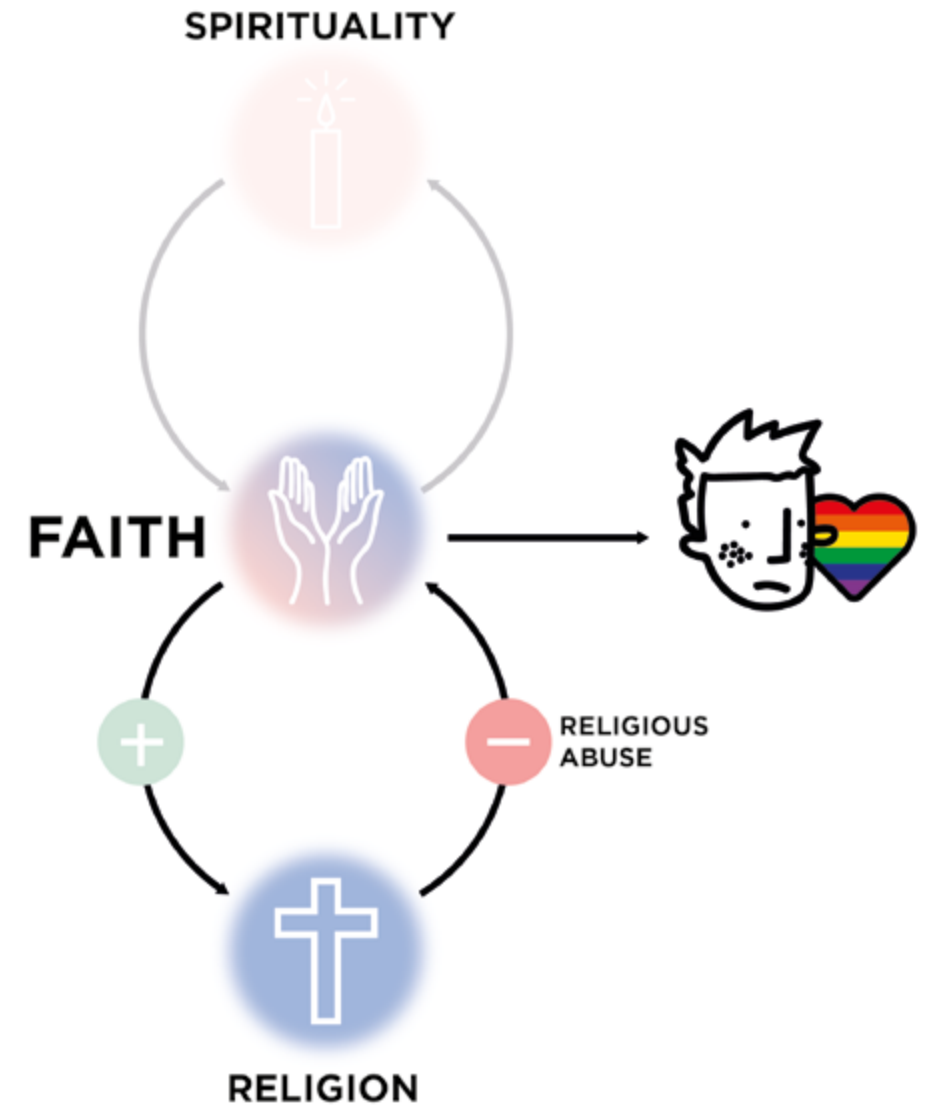


Figure 4
Due to the negative episodes that happen in the religious environments, Catholic LGBT+ members' faith is weakened

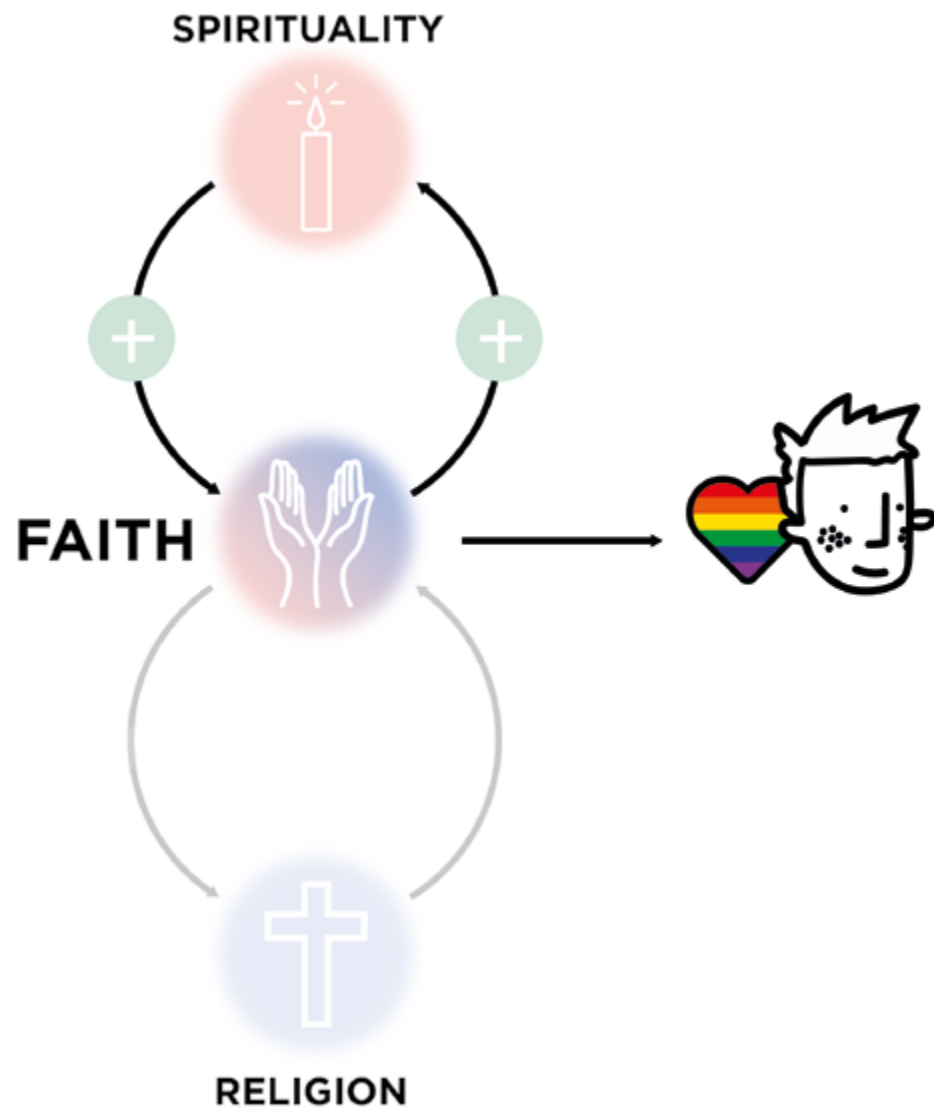


Figure 5
Based on literature, spirituality is the most positive aspect in Catholic LGBT+ faith.

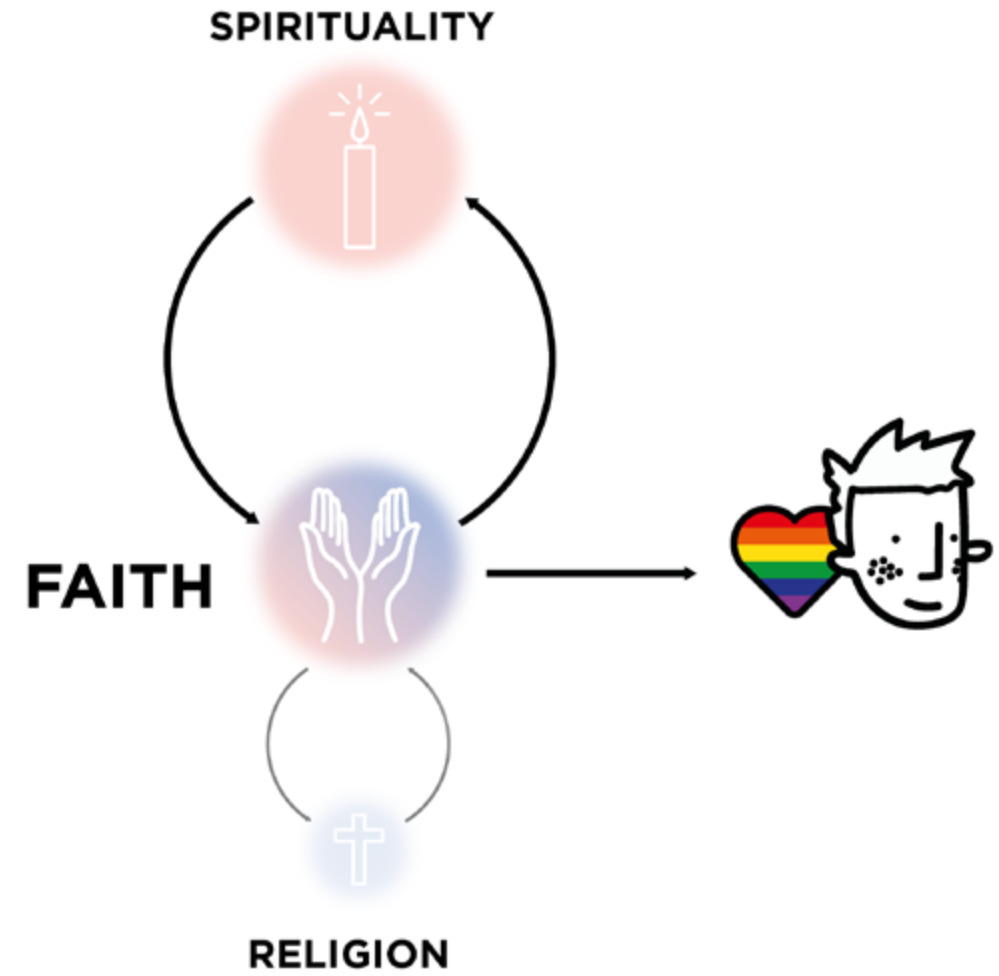


Figure 6
By reducing the impact of religion and increasing the one of spirituality, it is possible to nurture personal faith of Catholic LGBT+ members

Conclusions

The desk research pointed out that is not possible to directly influence religion to improve Catholic LGBT+ wellbeing due to the **complexity of the context and the impact that religion has on Italian society.**

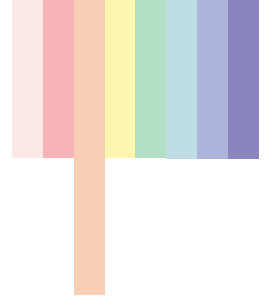
The official documents of the Roman Catholic Church describe **homosexuality as something to fight against.** As stated in the Catechism, for members of the LGBT+ community the only way to carry a good life is **avoiding any form of homosexual-affection.**

Moreover, in the Catholic environments episodes occur of **"Spiritual Abuse"**, the mistreatment of a person who needs help, support or spiritual empowerment with the result of **weakening one's spirituality.** These behaviors support the idea of LGBT+ members with Catholic beliefs that is **not possible to combine these two aspects.**

This hostility boosts an internal process called Internal Homophobia, a condition that leads homosexuals to have negative opinions towards themselves and the LGBT+ community.

However, Newman (2004) researched the differences between religion, spirituality, and faith. **In his theory, faith generates both religion and spirituality. Consequently, religion and spirituality influence faith either positively or negatively.** In the case of LGBT+ Catholics, religion negatively influences faith.

Therefore, for the goal of this project, **it is necessary to increase the impact that spirituality has on faith.** This will reduce the influence that religion has on the wellbeing of the target group, thus **limiting the effect of Spiritual Abuse and reduce people's Internalized Homophobia.** Eventually, leveraging on Spirituality only, a more positive connection with God will be created.



PRIMARY RESEARCH

This chapter presents a summary of the primary research conducted in Italy. **The activities revealed important data directly from the target group and validated important information coming from the desk research.**

The primary research identified the components of **Catholic LGBT+ members' relationship with God**, their most important **experiences connected to faith and sexuality**, and how they could **combine these two aspects**.

Furthermore, the research investigated how **Catholic LGBT+ members perceive their spirituality, religion, and faith**, and on which degree the target group recognize them as separated elements. The findings at the end of the chapter become the starting point for the analysis phase, thus they defined the direction of the project.

The interviews can be found in Appendix E and Appendix F.

Primary Research Overview

To understand the perspective of Italian Catholic Homosexuals, and in particular how they experience their personal relationship with God, a field research in the context has been conducted. Two main research questions were used to guide the entire research:

How Catholic LGBT+ members nurture their spiritual relationship with God and how they were able to merge homosexuality and spirituality?

What elements should be improved for a better spiritual relationship with God from the point of view of Catholic LGBT+ members?

The interviews were conducted in Milan and Mantua, two cities in the North of Italy. The participants were all born in different parts of Italy, thus their backgrounds differed slightly, therefore this research can represent different areas of Italy. All the eleven Catholic homosexuals were aged between 20 and 35 years old, three of them were women and eight of them were men. The interviews were conducted in Italian to obtain richer insights and to help participants explain the nuances of their realities. Later, the results were transcribed and the most important quotes highlighted for further analysis.

The focus of the interview was to understand the activities, definitions and personal history of Catholic Homosexuals in Italy. It has been investigated which are the objects and rituals that people perform to nurture a spiritual connection with God, their personal history, analyzing both the negative and positive episodes that influenced the relationship between their homosexuality and their spirituality and-or religiousness. Furthermore, their definition of spirituality and religion has

been analyzed, their point of view about the two topics and which elements of each part influence negatively and positively their overall wellbeing.

Vocabulary

The interview focused on the personal spirituality of people and their special relationship with God. It has been paid particular attention to the terms used during the sessions. The word "faith" was never used since from literature research it has been highlighted how it includes both "spirituality" and "religion".

Furthermore, it has been decided to avoid using the term spirituality since its definition is broader and doesn't refer only to the connection with the Catholic God. Therefore, the expression "spiritual connection with God" was adopted to investigate the intimate relationship that people nurture with their own divinity.



FOCUS GROUPS



INTERVIEWS



Figure 7
Overview of the participants involved in the research

Figure 8
Participants performing activities during the interviews



Findings

The interviews were transcribed, and the most important gatherings were collected and clustered. From the analysis, it was possible to generate five categories of findings.

From the sessions, it has been understood that for Catholic LGBT+ members religion and spirituality can not be perceived as two completely different concepts. People experience religion as a fundamental part of their spirituality, and some tools (e.g. Gospel) are the main way to support a personal relationship with God. This is also highlighted by participants' vocabulary since the term that has been used the most is "Faith". Furthermore, people said that being people of Faith means being it also outside.

THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION IS A GREY AREA



The analysis highlighted **several negative aspects related to the perception that Catholic Homosexuals have on religion**. In particular, when dealing with religion as an institution, its influence is dangerous for Catholic LGBT+.

First, participants perceived its **rigid rules as interference for establishing a sincere relationship with God**. These harsh guidelines are seen as the source of judgment coming from both members of the same religious community, and from an internal psychological dialogue that members develop toward himself/herself. As a result, the individual develops feelings of guilt and the perception that his/her actions are not in line with their religion. These rules are also unwelcomed because they are **seen as the result of human self-entitlement**, which has nothing to do with the true meaning of religion. Since they are perceived as coming from above with no justification or validation, **they can not be experienced as guidelines for personal development**.

Catholic LGBT+ described the institution of the **Catholic Church as not flexible**. This opinion is based on the fact that the Roman Catholic Church uses an **outdated point of view** to handle modern issues, and when it changes its attitude towards them, it takes years to do so. Specifically, the Church is **not open to discuss topics related to the LGBT+ community**, and when it does, it treats the topics with an obsolete mindset. These reasons endorse the idea that the institution of the Catholic Church is **unwelcoming** and that, according to the participants, promotes behaviors that are paradoxically against the message of the Gospel.

Furthermore, the way **rituals are used by the Catholic Church causes more harm than good**. Rituals are embedded with folklore, and they don't add a personal sense to Catholic LGBT+. Most of the traditional rituals are **meaningless** due to the fact that they don't nurture a personal connection with God, and they are performed just for traditions.



—SPIRITUALITY IS NECESSARY BUT NOT SUFFICIENT—

From the interviews, participants' definition of Spirituality was **"a personal connection that I have created with God"**. Spirituality is nurtured by spontaneous activities that people perform when it's needed. This created a more **sincere relationship with God that generates a dialog without an imposed medium**. The activity that people prefer to connect with God is **praying**. According to their experience, it boosts **meditation and introspection**, resulting in a healing moment for themselves. People associate praying with a sense of peace and inner calm, similar to the results of mindfulness sessions.

Participants mentioned that **activities created for reflecting** on their life, faith and relationship with God supported their personal spirituality and resulted in a powerful moment for introspection. These activities are done either solo or within a group, and most of the time they are conducted during dedicated meetings (Taizê, parish meetings, GIFRA) by spiritual guides.

Collective praying is also considered necessary to nurture a personal connection with God. This is done in **different forms** since besides engaging in collective reflections and prayers, Catholic LGBT+ members consider praying for other people a fundamental activity.

Some participants described their **spirituality as "intellectual"**. These people prefer to read books

about theology and philosophy for nurturing personal faith, and they are stimulated by **discussing these topics** with other intellectuals, both clergy members and other believers.

Eventually, Catholic LGBT+ members consider creating some time for themselves as a positive aspect of spirituality. This allows them to **reflect on what they feel is important and, once again, a moment for introspection**.

Rituals are perceived as valid tools to support spirituality when their meaning is understood and believed. Examples of rituals that Catholic LGBT+ members use are the rosary which is a solo activity or attending the mass, which is a collective ritual. In this case, rituals are in the category of faith, since they are related both to people's spirituality and religion.

However, **spirituality includes some negative aspects**. Most of the participants expressed negative opinions about the intangibility of spirituality. Compared to religion, which incorporates multiple symbols, objects, and places, **it is difficult for people to connect spirituality to intangible items**, and when a medium is needed, they struggle to find one.

Another important negative aspect of spirituality is its individuality. People perceive the **community as an important aspect of their relationship with God**, therefore the fact that spirituality is individual is seen as a component that could lead to narcissism. Moreover, participants believe that being separate from a religious community may promote the idea of being self-sufficient and having **"reached the perfect relationship with God"**, and that they don't need any support for their personal development.

Eventually, **spirituality is described as an activity that requires a lot of effort, in terms of time and energy**. People struggle when it comes to creating a solid **daily schedule for praying**, and this is because of the lack of external forces that guide

them in doing so. This component of spirituality is experienced by most of the participants, who would like to improve this aspect in their everyday life.

These episodes concern religious leaders that condemn homosexuality, communities that were pursuing a strict model of living, and judgments coming from other members.



—NEED FOR GUIDELINES

All the participants reported that their seeking for guidelines was fundamental to their connection with God and to overcome spiritual struggles. All the personal stories showed that **to overcome moments of spiritual uncertainties, the support of spiritual guides who belong to a group or an organization was indispensable**. In some specific moments, reading the Gospel was also working as a source of support for inspiration and solutions to problems.

Despite the official point of view of the Roman Catholic Church about homosexuality is negative, LGBT+ Catholics **experienced a welcoming side of it**. One of the most important moments in participants' life was **meeting a clergy member that has not a negative opinion about the LGBT+ community, and that didn't perceive same-sex attraction a problem or something to be fixed**. This sense of inclusion helped participants to remain Catholic, and the guidance from the clergy switched their perception towards a new, inclusive and loving God. Thus, the guidelines coming from religious leaders were the ones that helped people the most. The Spiritual support within the Church from supportive clergy has been reported to be most impactful for Catholic homosexuals, followed by groups of believers where being LGBT+ was not a problem for the members.

However, being part of a community can have a negative influence on people. In several cases, LGBT+ Catholics took part in activities with people that affected negatively their personal spiritual development.



SELF-OPINIONS ON HOMOSEXUALITY

Participants had **different opinions about their homosexuality** during the early stage of awareness.

Some participants went through difficult moments because **they perceived their sexuality as a challenge coming from God, a test, or just that being homosexual is not in line with being Catholic.** These participants were the ones that experienced a turbulent relationship with God. They went through **strong emotions**, such as anger towards God, and they strongly believed that **God wouldn't have loved them if they had embraced their sexuality.**

Other participants felt that **being homosexual was part of a bigger plan, and they recognize their sexuality as a gift from God.** These people didn't experience any form of emotional distress related to combine their faith and their nature. One reason they didn't struggle with the two aspects is because they immediately recognize **which part of the Church is build by humans, and which is based on the message of Christ.**

Part of the Catholic LGBT+ members believe that **being LGBT+ is a blessing because it makes you question your true values, your spirituality and beliefs**, resulting in a more genuine and authentic faith.



BEING CATHOLIC AS LIFE DIRECTION

Being Catholic has been described as a component that **influences each aspect of personal life**, and that ideally people need to follow in every daily moment to be in line with the message of the Gospel.

One of the most experienced needs of Catholic homosexuals is the **desire of helping other people**, which can be done in different ways. Being environmentally friendly and practice volunteering activities were some examples, but also **helping other LGBT+ Catholics that are struggling with combining these two aspects.**

People identify with younger Catholic homosexuals and they want to provide them a helping hand. However, some participants reported that **"being in the closet"** (a term that means that the person hasn't revealed his/her sexuality yet to others) **is the main obstacle**, and that this decreases the chance of receiving the support that they would like to provide.

Conclusions

The activities show that **the target group can not make a clear division between religion and spirituality.** Each of the two aspects contains negative and positive aspects, thus **leaving out one of the two drives to a weaker connection with God.**

However, religion contains more negative components than spirituality. On the other hand, the target group considers **the sense of community as one of the biggest values of their faith**, therefore the individualistic aspect of spirituality is negatively perceived.

Being part of a community is therefore positive, but participants reported unpleasant episodes in the past. **Receiving guidelines** from a member of a community was the most important condition that helped them to combine their faith (the combination of spirituality and religion) with their sexuality.

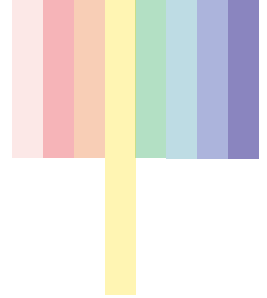
The **realization of being homosexual** was perceived as a problem for some participants, but others did not feel like it since immediately they were able to see it as part of their identity and therefore as a gift from God.

Eventually, Catholic LGBT+ members reported **the will to help others** that are struggling with combining faith with their homosexuality as one of the ways for following the message of the Gospel.

According to the primary research results, **it is not possible to isolate religion in Catholic LGBT+ members' faith and nurture spirituality as a separate element.** In particular, the support of a community is one of the most important aspects of religion that is missing in spirituality, despite belonging to a community that is perceived both negative and positive. **Being part of a group can be a source of suffering (e.g. Spiritual Abuse) but**

personal experiences highlighted it as the main help for combining their faith with their sexuality. Moreover, the target group perceives the **need of helping other members that are going through the same journey**, thus the need for a community is perceived as a fundamental aspect of their life.

These aspects are going to be used in the following steps of the project, in particular, to **define the direction before the idea generation phase.**



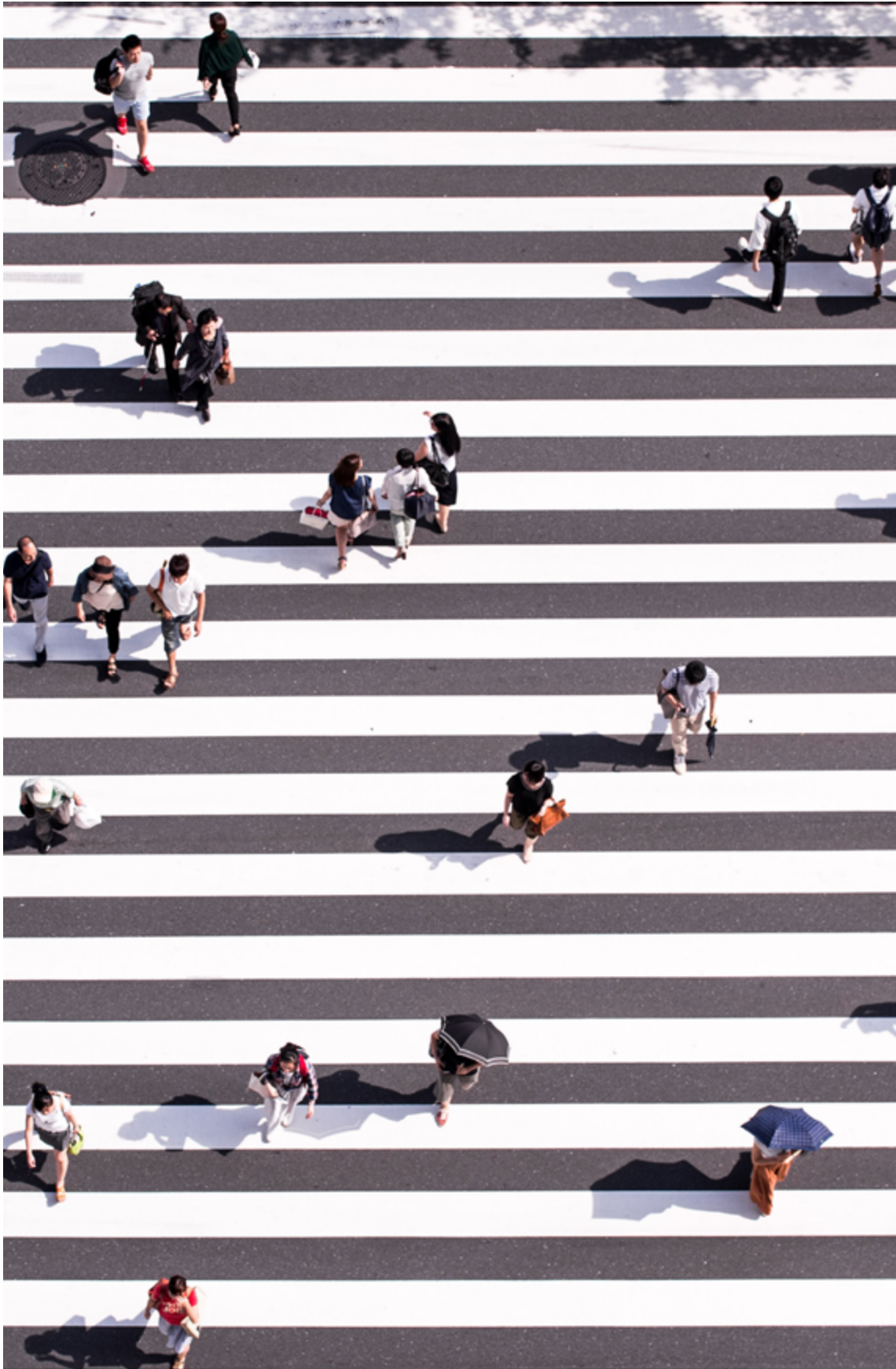
ANALYSIS PHASE

The analysis phase took into consideration the **important findings gathered from the desk research and the primary research.**

These pages present **three different personas** built on the results of the previous chapters. The personas represent three different profiles of Catholic LGBT+ members, thus they illustrate the **different need and experiences of the target group.**

Moreover, these pages describe **the most important dilemmas** discovered during the research phase. These dilemmas represent the most relevant conflicting concerns of Catholic LGBT+.

At the end of the analysis phase, the project will focus on **two personas**, and on **one dilemma.**



Personas

Based on the findings of the primary research, **three different personas were created.** Despite several experiences and needs are shared by Catholic LGBT+, their points of view on various topics are different, therefore it is important to create multiple psychological profiles to represent the three different kinds of participants.

These profiles are used to **communicate the findings quicker and clearer.** They also help **select the segments of the target group to focus on** in the “develop” and “deliver” phase.

NAME: Alberto
AGE: 25
GENDER: Male



Alberto comes out of the closet when he is 20. To him it was really difficult to accept the fact that he is gay, because in his parish the priest was not accepting of the LGBT+ community.



The most negative aspect of the Roman Catholic Church for him is the sense of guilt coming from the rules. Even if he knows that these are written from humans to humans, he is still working on this aspect of his religion.



He is member of two different Catholic groups, and one of them is with other Catholic LGBT+ people. Thanks to this group and the activities he was able to see a new image of God. He would like to help people who are struggling with their nature and spirituality.

He likes to pray with the rosary, and thinks it is important to do it with other people when possible.

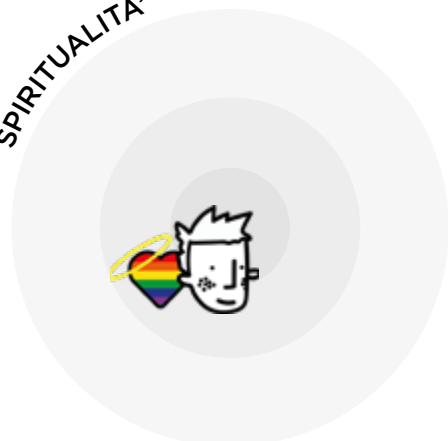
“I ask God to meet many beautiful people and communities. I want people in this house, I want to participate in activities, I want to live in community, with many communities”
F, 26

“I would like to demonstrate to others as a beautiful, rich, joyful daughter of God ... but being half-hidden at this stage is a bit complicated”
M, 24

LEVEL OF RELIGIOUSNESS AND SPIRITUALITY

SPIRITUALITA'

RELIGIONE



NAME: Marco
AGE; 26
GENDER: Male



Marco never saw his sexuality as a problem. He came out to his parents as soon as he discovered about his homosexuality.



What he really can not stand about the Roman Church is the imposition of rules and beliefs from above, without explanation.



He prefers to nurture spirituality by his own, in a very intellectual way. He loves to read books about philosophy and theology and have conversations about them with other people that share the same interests, including his spiritual father.

He is not part of a christian group, but when he needs to get in contact with some other LGBT+ Catholics, he uses an online chat called Gabriel.

“I live in a bizarre little Catholic world. a very intellectual Catholic bubble and I attend Mass in Latin”
F, 26

LEVEL OF RELGIOSNESS AND SPIRITUALITY

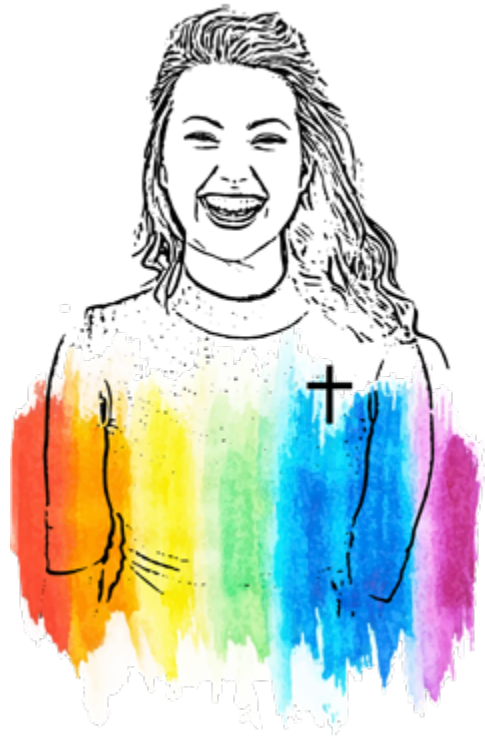
SPIRITUALITA'

RELIGIONE



“Friar Michele, let’s say my confessor, an elderly person ... I have an extreme culture so confessions with him are always very particular”
A, 28

NAME: Claudia
AGE; 23
GENDER: Female



Claudia came out as Pansexual when she was 16. She sees her sexual orientation as a blessing from God because it made her revalue her faith.



The most negative aspect of the Roman Catholic Church for her is that the Church is not flexible and it doesn't want to talk about the LGBT+ community. For her, this creates an unwelcome feeling, which is against the message of Jesus.



She is part of a Catholic group, where she met Suor Cristina, her spiritual guide since she moved to Milan. To her, religion is an accessory for Spirituality. Despite she considers herself Catholic, she doesn't like to go to Church because she sees it as a sterile ritual that doesn't add anything to her. She also lives his Spirituality in an spontaneous way. In doing so she doesn't have a routine for praying, and she sees nurturing spirituality as a task that requires a lot of effort.

“Positive religion gives you a “code” in the sense that it gives you a moral code that you should follow. So let’s say it gives you some rules, some rules.”

E, 29

“It is difficult to divide spirituality and religion as if they were two different planets”

G, 24

LEVEL OF RELIGIOUSNESS AND SPIRITUALITY

SPIRITUALITA'



RELIGIONE

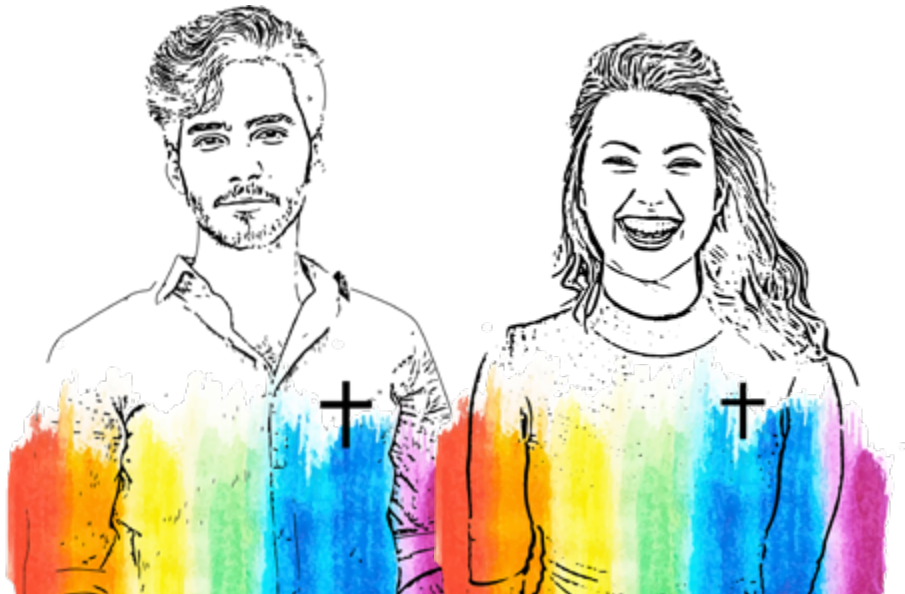


Selected Personas

In the following phases, it has been decided to make a selection of the personas to use. The choice has been made based on the gatherings from the research and on which profile could provide more interesting design outcomes.

Therefore, **the focus of the project will be on the personas of Alberto and Claudia.** They represent a larger part of the target group and their experiences highlight interesting topics that could **lead to design directions which support a meaningful and positive relationship with God.**

The persona of Marco is too specific and his way to approach spirituality doesn't represent a big number of participants. Besides, participants represented by Marco already practice several solo activities to nurture their spirituality, therefore the design solution would have a minor impact on their life.



Chosen Dilemmas

From the previews research, several dilemmas have been highlighted. **Each of them represents one of the main issues that LGBT+ Catholic have in terms of combining their spirituality and their sexuality.** These dilemmas are chosen and laddered according to the experiences that the target group shared, and consequentially on the design opportunities that could emerge from them.

For this project, it has been decided to focus on the dilemma:

“I want to be in contact with other people who were struggling with being homosexual and Catholic, but I want to stay in the closet”

It represents **one of the most important experience of LGBT+ Catholics,** and it provides an interesting design space where to scout an opportunity for a design intervention without compromising one of the two concerns involved.

The “design for dilemmas” approach was chosen based on it's relevance to the project, and because of the interesting stimuli that it provides to the designer. Working on two concerns without compromise one of the two is the focus of this work, therefore this approach is in line with the goal of the project.

I want to nurture spirituality by my own

BUT

*I want to nurture a collective way of
praying*

*I want my prayers routine to be
spontaneous*

BUT

I want the support of a ritual daily

*I want to be in contact with other
people who were struggling with
being homosexual and Catholic*

BUT

I want to stay in the closet

*I would like to have a strict routine for
praying*

BUT

*I want my spirituality to be
spontaneous*

I want to be in contact with other people who were struggling with being homosexual and Catholic but I want to stay in the closet

Because I want to feel better with myself



Because I want to merge these two aspects of my life



Because I want to know whether it is possible to merge the two aspects



I want to be in contact with other people who were struggling with being homosexual and Catholic

I want to be in contact with other people who were struggling with being homosexual and Catholic but I want to stay in the closet

Because I want to be part of my community



Because I want to feel welcomed by members of my Church



Because I am not ready to face its consequences



I want to stay in the closet

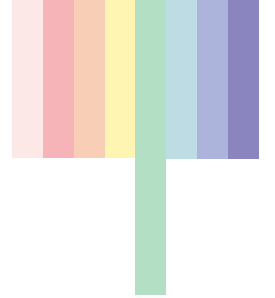
Conclusions

This project will focus on two specific personas. Alberto and Claudia represent a section of the target group who shared important life experiences, and that can lead the designer to design opportunities later on in the process. From here, **the project will focus on people who benefit from communities, whose affirmation of sexuality has been difficult and who value rituals embedded with meaning.**

Eventually, the project will focus on the dilemma **"I want to want to be in contact with other people who were struggling with being homosexual and Catholic but I want to stay in the closet"**. This means that in the ideation phase, the designer will use this dilemma to create a design goal that can fulfill both concerns from the perspective of Alberto and Claudia.



**YOU
ARE
LOVED**



IDEATION PHASE

The ideation phase summarizes the gathered knowledge to create a more **specific direction**. It presents a Design Goal subdivided into four different statements. They all represent a different segment of the context, thus **the future design solution has to fulfill each of them to match the needs of Catholic LGBT+ members**. Furthermore, the Design Goal introduces the terms “**Small Brother**” and “**Big Brother**”, the main actors in the design directions.

The illustrated Interaction Vision contributes to the project in two different ways. **It provides inspiration** for the idea generation phase, and it **produces evaluation tools** for the qualities of the desired interaction.

Eventually, the chapter shows the **three main design directions gathered from workshop sessions and personal ideation**. It illustrates the positive and negative aspects of each, and ultimately, **which direction was selected**.

Design Goal



Figure 9
Visualization of the Design Goal

BIG BROTHERS

Catholic members of the LGBT+ community, out of the closet, that were able to reconcile their sexuality with their relationship with God.

SMALL BROTHERS

Catholic members of the LGBT+ community, in the closet, that are struggling in reconciling their sexuality with their relationship with God.

*I want to switch perspective of **SMALL BROTHERS** from a God that condemns homosexuality to a loving and accepting one by nurturing...*

*A feeling of guidance by building up a trustworthy connection with **BIG BROTHERS***

A feeling of belonging by associating them with people alike

*A feeling of hope by inspiring them with the experiences of **BIG BROTHERS***

*A feeling of protection by providing them a safe space to relate with **BIG BROTHERS***

Interaction Vision

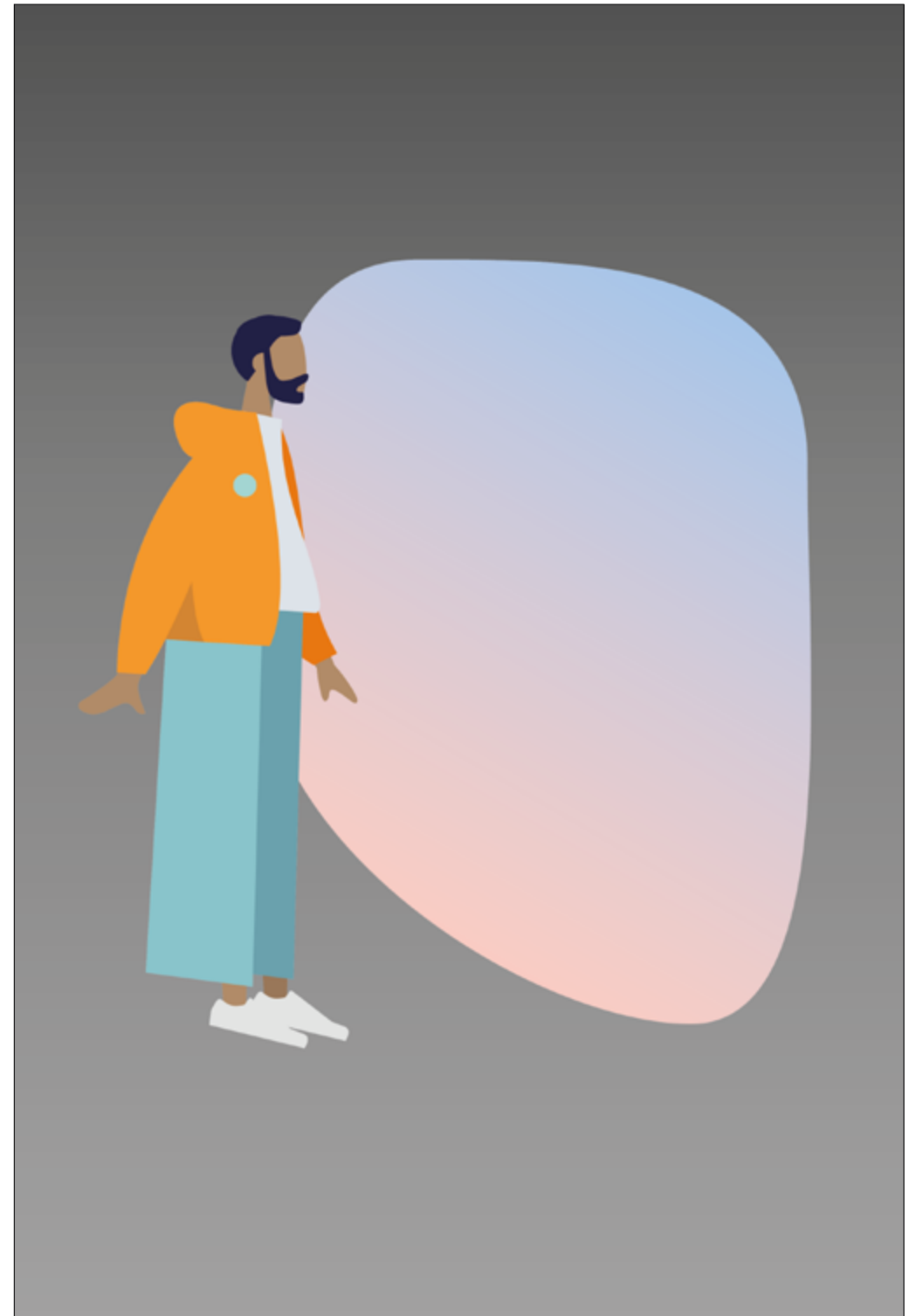
In these pages, the desired interaction that the final solution should enable is presented. The story between a Small Brother and a Big Brother represents an **imaginary interaction that takes into account the chosen design qualities and that embodies the emotions that the solution is aiming for.**

The interaction vision will be used to check whether the solutions coming from the idea generation phase **can materialize the chosen qualities** and whether the design intervention **enables the same interaction.**

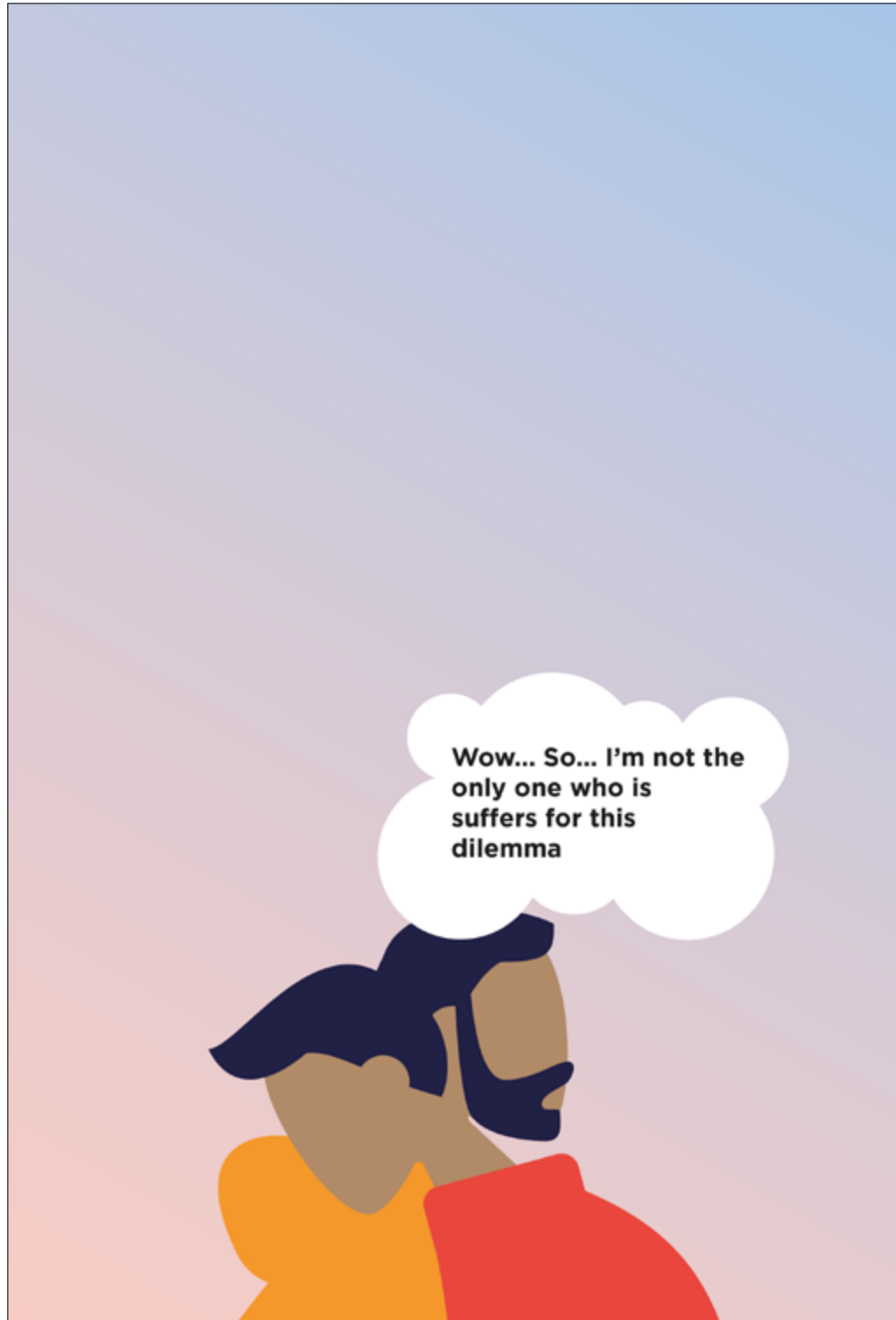
Design Qualities

Guided
(and consequently Evolving)
Private
Reassuring
(and consequently Relieving)
Delicate
Poetic
Tender
Authentic
Introspective



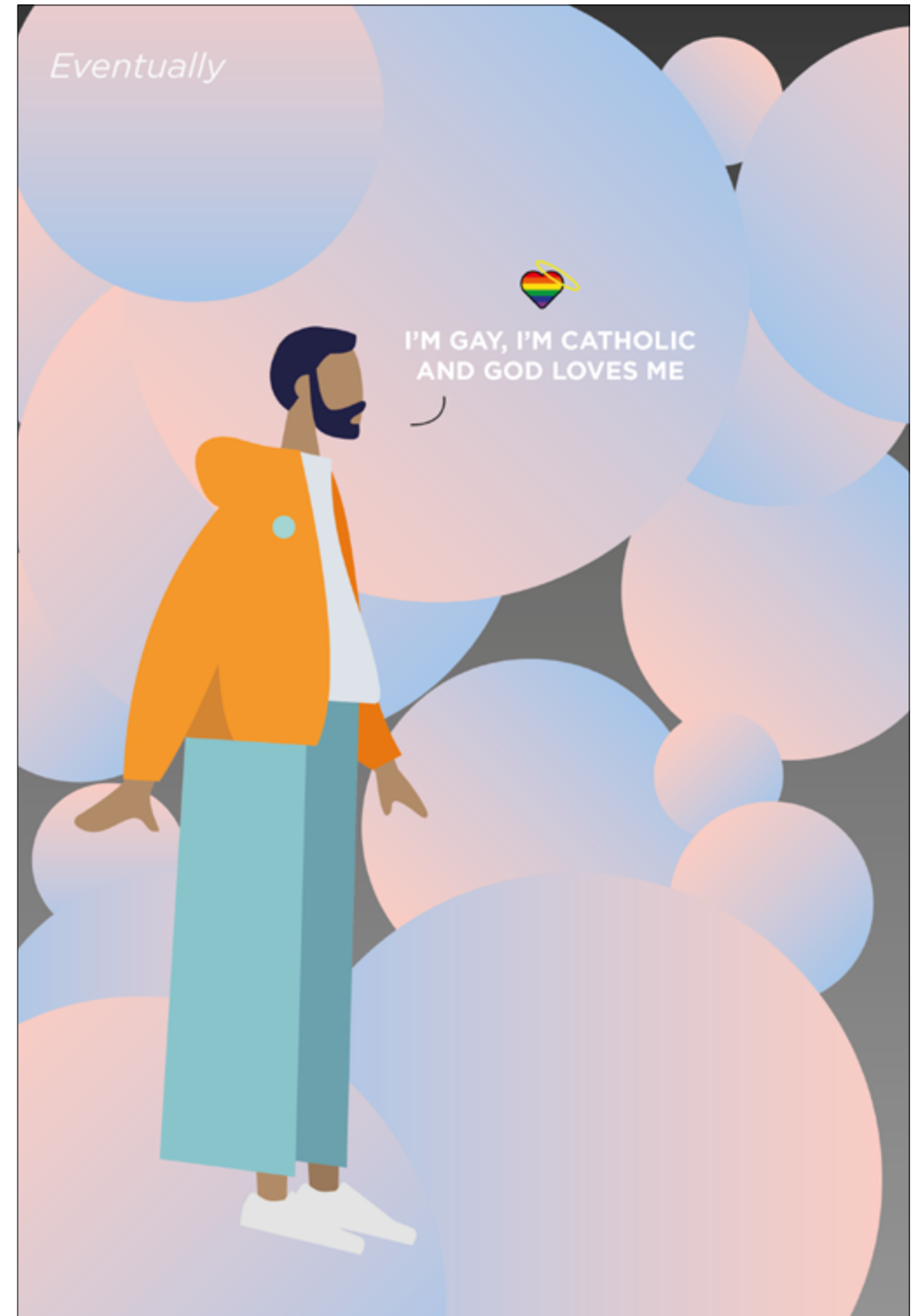
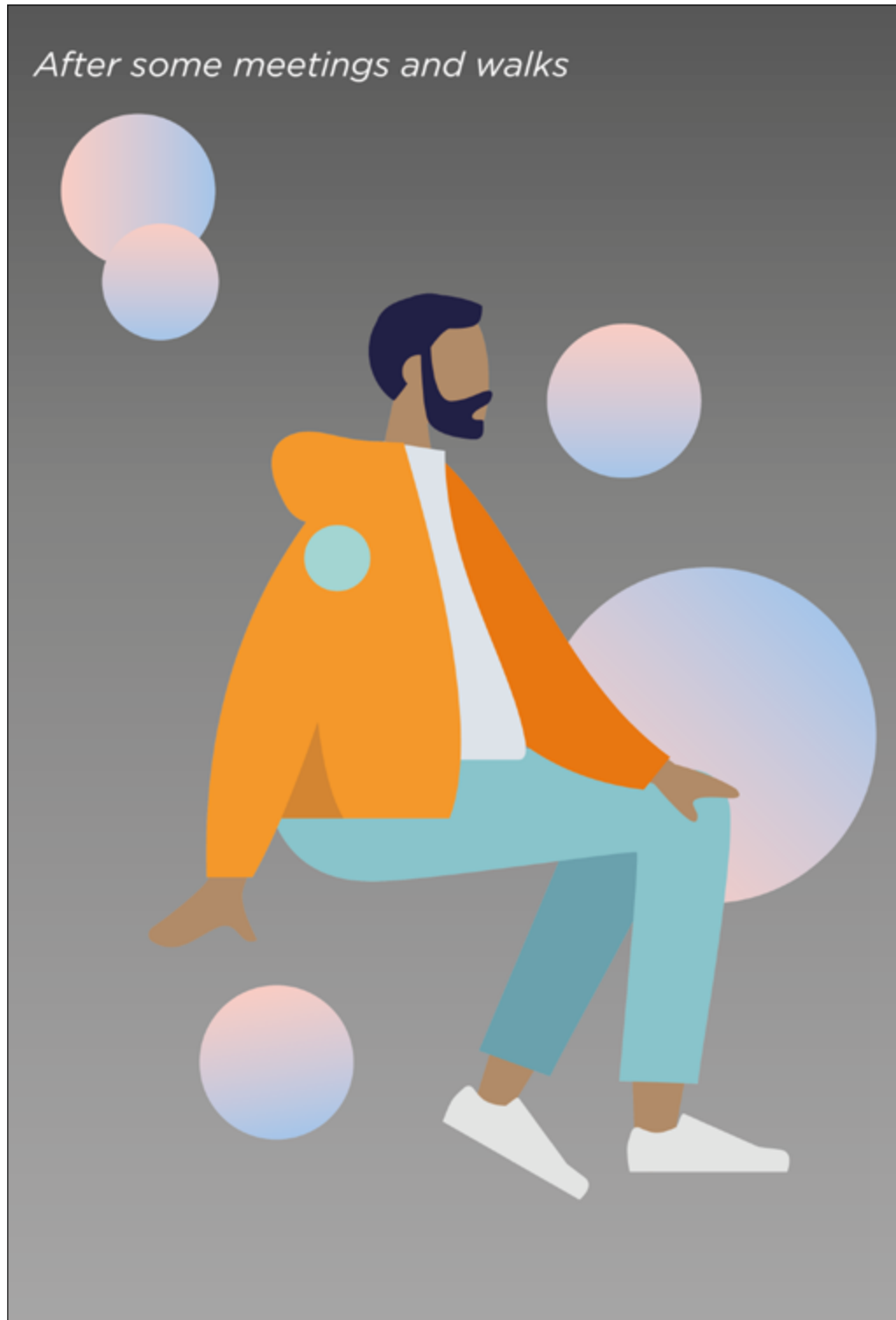












Concepts Direction

During the ideation session, **the outcomes of two generative sessions were used as starting points.** The results worked as a **source of inspiration** for the concepts since the sessions were merely inspirational and no concepts were expected as results.

The first session (Figure 11) was conducted during the course Creative Facilitation, while the second (Figure 12) was organized with design students coming from a Catholic Background together with members of the LGBT+ community.

Based on these outcomes, **three different design directions emerged.**

Requirements

Each design solution had to contain a moment for reflection, a ritual aspect and a way to connect Small Brothers with Big Brothers. These components were listed according to the outcomes of the primary and secondary research, where it was highlighted:

1. **The importance of reflections for nurturing personal faith and switching personal points of view.**
2. **The positive impact of having a person alike to share personal concerns and doubts related to personal faith.**
3. **The importance of a ritual to pursue behavioral change by attaching meaning to an action that, from an external point of view, appears as a non-sense routine.**



Figure 10
Ideation workshop conducted in September with the course Creative Facilitation

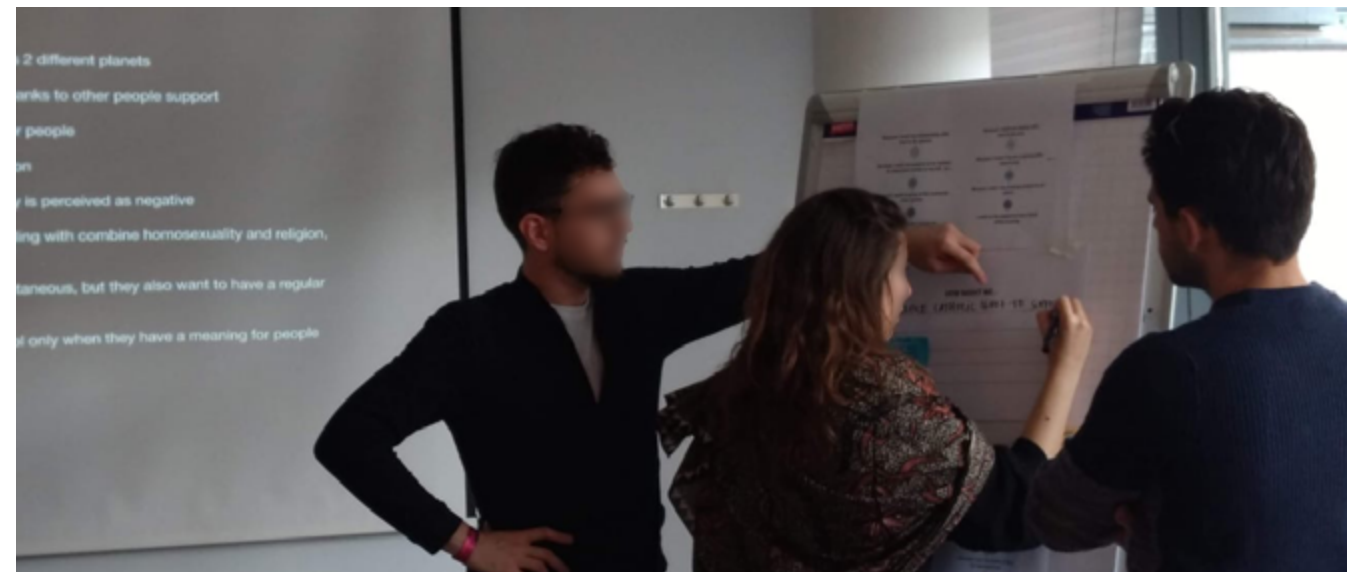


Figure 11
Ideation workshop conducted in October

1. Set of cards

The first design direction was a deck of cards inspired by the session's outcomes and with the folkloristic tradition of the Holy Pictures in Italy, a rectangular cardboard on which is represented the figure of a saint or a sacred object (Figure 13).

The focus of this idea was to **provide Small Brothers a reflection every month related to a topic decided prior**. The topic is displayed with a visual on the card.
Every month a letter containing the card and a bubble-blower arrives at the post, and the Small Brother is asked to pick it up. This allows Small Brothers to **keep their identity secret** since they don't have to receive the letter at home.

In a quiet and safe environment (e.g. bedroom), the Small Brother can scan the QR code on the card, and have access to the **video in which the Big Brother explains the topic and provides material for personal reflection**.
 After the reflection, the Small Brother is asked to write a prayer on the back of the card, and blow soap bubbles with the bubble-blower. This final action **symbolizes sending the prayer to God**. For the rest of the month, the Small Brother keeps the card in the wallet.



Figure 13
 Prototype of the deck of cards idea

Figure 12
 Inspiration for this idea: "Holy cards" and one of the results from the workshop in October.



- Using a small card that is kept in the wallet provides a hidden and discreet interaction. **This provides a sense of safety in Small Brother.**
- The involvement of soap bubbles creates a **poetic aspect of the ritual**, which is one of the most important design qualities.
- The reflection's topic is decided prior. **This doesn't allow the Small Brother to bring his/her problems to the conversation and tackle personal issues.**
- The interaction with the Big Brother is **not a two-way conversation** since it occurs only with videos from the Big Brother. Here, the Small Brother **doesn't have a proper relationship with the other person.**
- The overall design direction is **based on sympathy and not empathy**. This concept doesn't provide the Small Brother a sense of trust and belonging to the other person, and it **doesn't create a meaningful connection with him/her.**
- The ritual and the cards are perceived as **two different interactions**. The impression is that the support for reflections and the bubble blower are separate since there are **no elements that would connect them.**

2. Booklet

Another design direction was a booklet containing **daily activities** that Small Brothers would do every day for a **week**. This has been inspired by the Gospel, as source of personal growth. The booklet is created by the assigned Big Brother and aims to **support the personal Faith of small brothers and switch their minds to a loving and caring God**. Every activity has to be conducted in a private moment of the day in a safe environment chosen by the Small Brother.

After the daily reflection moment, a part of the activity is designed to guide the Small brother in **creating a personal ritual**. The Small Brother is asked to list a small interaction based on the reflections, and at the end of the week the combination of all the seven small steps will create the ritual of the Small Brother.

Figure 14
Inspiration for this idea: Gospel and one of the results from the workshop in October.



Figure 15
Prototype of the booklet idea

The reflections with visual supports are perceived as **guiding and stimulating**. The material boosts a **deeper reflection on the topic** and provide guidelines for reflecting on difficult topics.

A ritual created directly by the Small Brother produces **directly a meaningful and personal interaction**. In this way, each step is embedded with personal meaning and its unnecessary to explain its purpose to the Small Brother.

Despite the activities were built by a Big Brother, **this connection is not perceived by Small Brother** as much as it was intended to be. The interaction between the two is **too weak**

compared to the desired result.

The booklet is a physical object. Despite that the Small Brother can hide it somewhere safe, there is always the risk that it could be found by other people. Thus having this specific support **does not provide a sense of safety in Small Brothers**.

The creation of the activities is **too time-consuming for Big Brothers**. Furthermore, it would require specific **training of the Big Brother regarding the topics**, how to tackle them, and preparation of the activities to make it successful.

3. Digital Service

The last design direction made during the ideation phase was a **digital service**. The inspiration for this concept comes from the idea of **having a spiritual guide in moments when it's not possible to be physically in the same room with someone that can guide you through difficult moments**.

This digital service provides to Small Brothers a digital platform on their smartphone on which it is possible to **share personal thoughts related to the ongoing process of reconciliation between homosexuality and faith**. This conversation is done every week with a Big Brother.

In this way, Small Brothers can **question their point of view and empathize with someone alike**. Furthermore, the Big Brother will provide to the Small Brother material for **personal reflections**, that will be used in the parts of the interaction connected with the ritual.

Specifically, Small Brothers will **perform a ritual with ice-cubes and a scent burner based on their reflections**. When the Small Brothers realize that one belief has been changed, it will be written on the app and one ice-cube from the freezer will

be placed in a glass. Then, they will write the new belief in a different section, while the ice will be melting into water. Eventually, Small Brothers will write a prayer to thank God for this new belief, which will be **delivered to God by evaporating the water through the scent burner**.

Figure 17 Prototype of the digital service

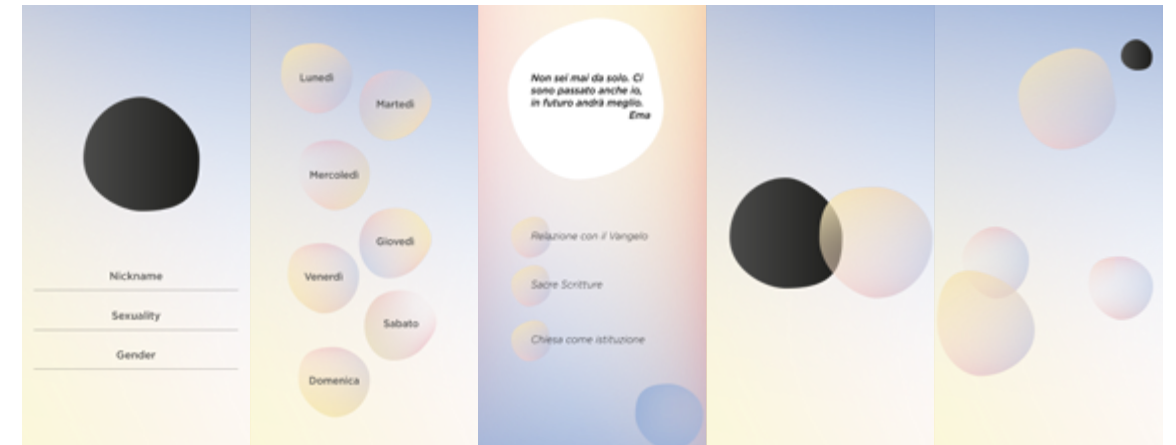


Figure 16
Inspiration for this idea: Spiritual guides and one of the results from the workshop in October.



The Small Brother is in control of the topics and can address personal issues for **discussions with the Big Brother**.

The interaction provides a **sense of safety** to the Small Brother since all the information is on the app on their smartphone. By doing so external people can not accidentally find sensitive material.

Reflections are suggestions, therefore not imposed. In this way, Small Brothers can decide their reflections based on the topics they feel more in line with their situation.

The ritual is a **fundamental part of the digital service**, and the whole interaction is combined with it.

Big Brother needs to **train on which kind of answers they need to provide**. The video-answer has to be structured to support Small Brothers' problems.

It is difficult to create an **immediate sense of trust between the Small Brother and Big Brothers**.

Final Decision

Eventually, it was decided to select **the digital service** as the final idea. This choice has been done since this specific concept is the one that **takes into account the experience of Small Brothers the most, and it connects Small Brothers and Big Brothers directly.**

Despite the interesting interactions, all the other design directions focused more on **“silver-lining” the struggles and experiences of Small Brothers,** since they could not choose the most important aspects to discuss with the Big Brothers.

Furthermore, the ritual aspect of the cards and booklets was perceived as an addition, while in the case of the application the ritual is an **integral part of the experience.**

In the deliver phase, the designer will research how to solve the problems of the digital service and will incorporate feedback from the target group to make changes for the final solution.

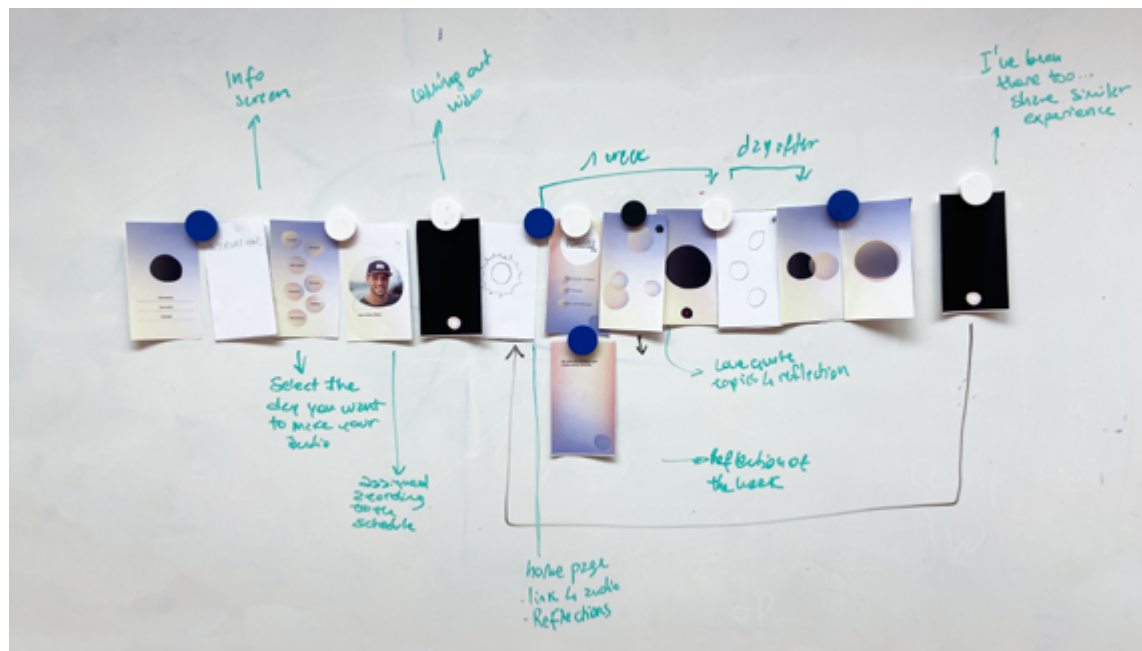
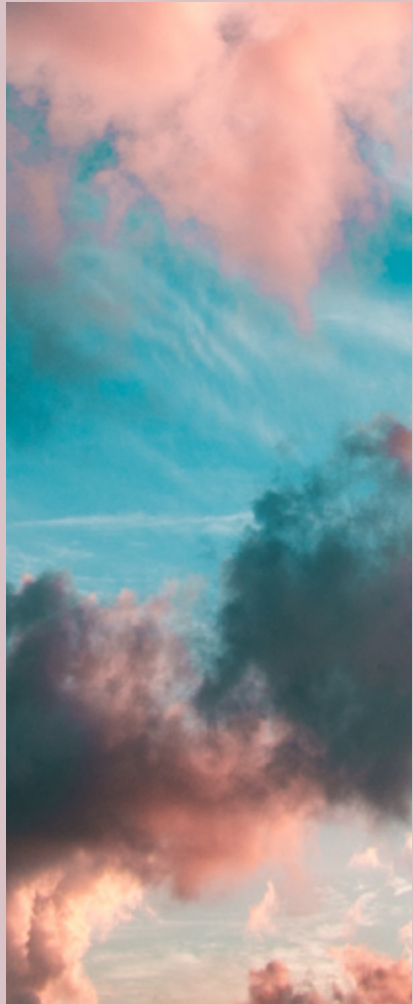
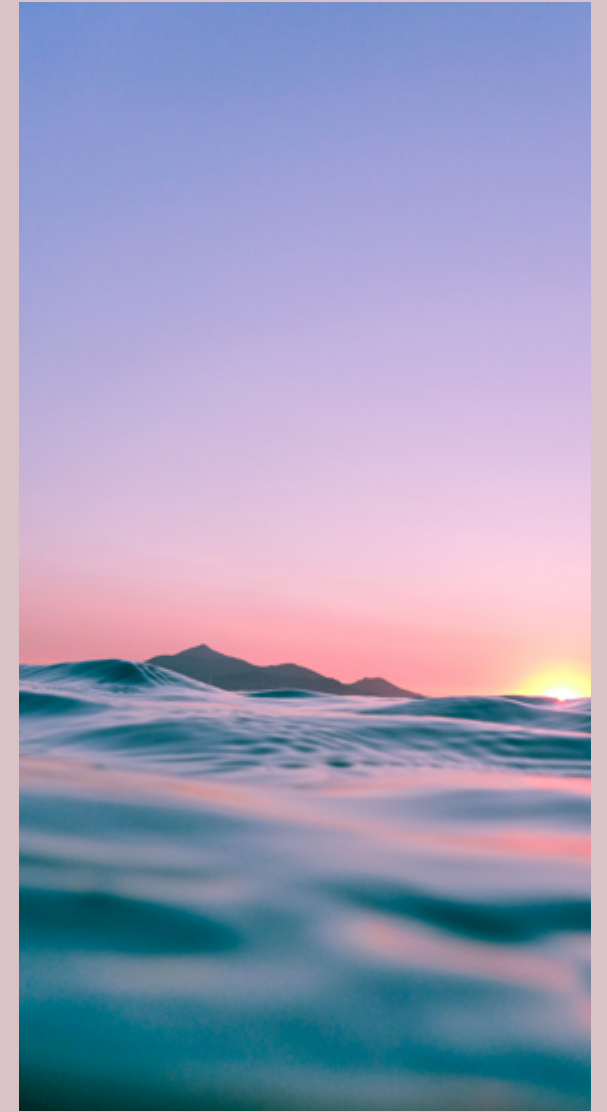
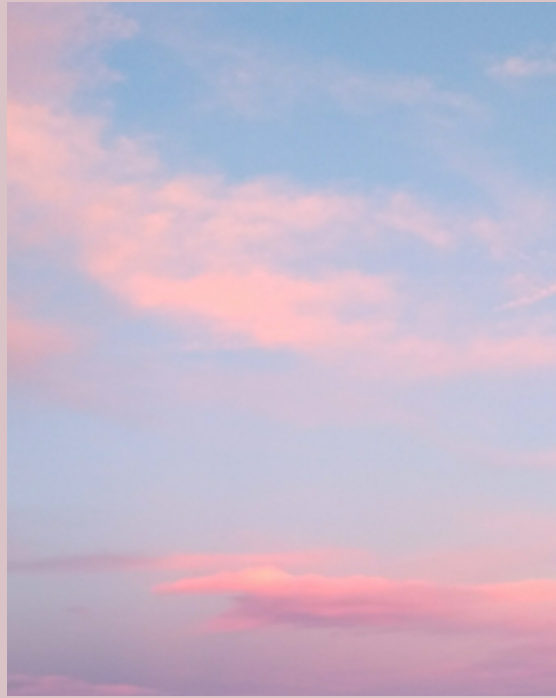


Figure 18 Analysis of the frames in the digital service



Figure 19 Analysis of the WW in an early stage of the idea development

Inspirational Moodboard



Conclusions

At this stage, the focus of the project is to **relate Catholic LGBT+ members that are living different stages of their life: Big Brothers and Small Brothers**. The chosen Design Goal aims to create a design solution capable of **transforming Small Brothers' perception of God thanks to personal reflection and the support of Big Brother**.

The Interaction Vision provides a solid guideline to be followed. Its design qualities were used to **build design directions** and will **examine the design solution in the final stage of the project**.

The material from two different generative sessions inspired **three different design directions**: a deck of cards, a booklet, and a digital service.

Eventually, it was decided to **focus on the digital service** because it is more in line with the selected interaction vision and Design Goal.

In the concept development phase, further research will **improve the weak points, develop the ritual aspect and strengthen the overall experience** of the chosen design direction.



CONCEPT DEVELOPEMENT

“La Corrente” is a **digital service** in combination with a **ritual** to help Small Siblings to reflect on their sexuality in relationship with their faith. The first pages explain the activities carried out to **improve the idea, improve the UX and the overall experience of the design solution.**

Here is presented **the scenario of the first time use of Small Siblings** (previously Small Brothers, see page 105) of “La Corrente”. This explains how the target group gets to know the application, which are the most important steps and the procedures of the ritual. A section of the chapter shows the **most important frameworks** of the application and the reasons behind those design choices. The same section better explains **the procedure and meaning of the designed ritual.**

Eventually, the chapter presents **the results of the validation activities.** Semi-structured interviews and an analysis of the design qualities helped to collect feedback for improving this project in its further steps.

Design direction development

Based on the outcomes of the ideation phase, **some aspects of the chosen design direction needed to be reconsidered.** In particular, it was necessary to research the **kind of response** that Big Brothers had to give to Small Brother and on which degree it is possible to **create trust and belonging without exposing the Small Brother too much.**

To do so, it was decided to dive into further **literature research** and set-up a **focus group** with the target group.

The literature research focused on **understanding the basics of empathy**, and to find a simple way for Big Brothers to express it towards Small Brothers.

The focus group was used to collect **feedback from Catholic homosexuals.** Their opinion was used to change the design solution according to the degree of intimacy required from people “in the closet” to create a meaningful connection without being too exposed. Furthermore, this activity was used to examine the overall opinion that the target group had towards the digital service.



Figure 20
The improvements have been made with additional research and feedback from a focus group

How to channel Empathy?

One of the most important points to be researched was related to the modality of responses that big Brothers have to give to Small Brothers, always keeping in mind to display **empathy and not sympathy.**

As reported by Rogers (1975), Empathy is composed of 3 different phases. The first one is called “**entering**”. In this phase, the listener tries to be part of the world of the speaker and builds sensitivity to the experience of the other person. The second phase is named “**living**”. This phase is described as temporary living the speaker’s life and experiencing the other’s point of view avoiding any judgments. The last phase is called “**communicating**”. In this stage, the listener communicates the perceived senses and understandings to the other, checking if they are correct and being guided by the speaker’s responses.

Based on this information, the research focused on **how to display Empathy in a simple and clear way.**

According to Pudlinski (2005), One of the most effective ways to express empathy is by **sharing personal experiences and stories,** Since this highlights that the person listening was able to understand the other person’s emotions and feelings.

CHANGES

Therefore, It has been decided that Big Brother’s response will be based on personal experiences similar to Small Brother’s. Leveraging on comparable experiences, Big Brother will **display a simple yet powerful empathic response without the need for training.**

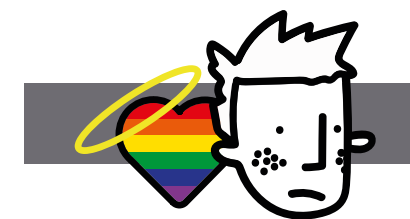
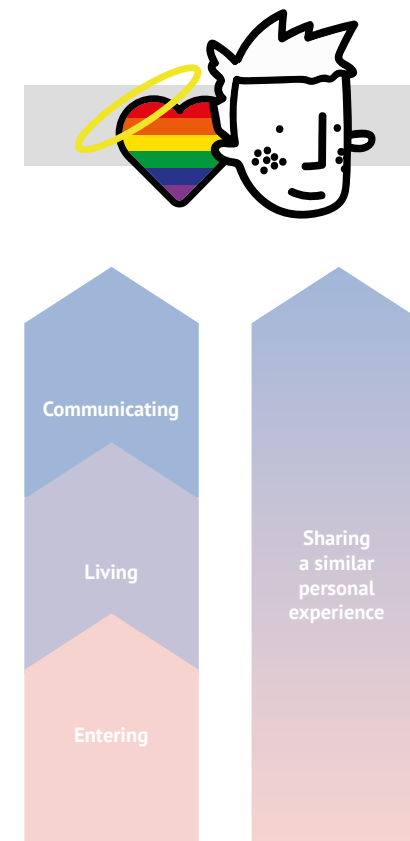


Figure 21
Model that represents that sharing personal experience similar to the sender’s include the three steps of empathy



Figure 22
Participants going through the application during the focus group

Focus Group

The idea of the app has been presented to some Catholic LGBT to receive their feedback and implement the concept accordingly.

A mockup of the application was created, and participants had to go through the whole interaction to grasp what the designer wanted to achieve. At the beginning of the session, it has been explained the context of use, the definition of “Small Brother” and “Big Brother” and how the involved ritual works.

After the session, **the opinions of participants were asked regarding the whole experience, which parts they liked and which aspects could be improved.**

The result highlighted that Small Brothers using audio and Big Brothers using video creates a proper connection between the two without attaching them too much.

Since Small Brothers are living a delicate moment of their life, **the risk is to develop romantic feelings towards their Big Brother**, but keeping their identity hidden doesn’t allow this to happen.

Moreover, **the app has been perceived as a worthy helping hand in the first stage of combining the two aspects**, but it is necessary to think about it as a **temporary solution** and to select an appropriate moment for this interaction to end.

In the section related to the material for the Small Brother, it has been suggested to **add a section dedicated to passages of the Bible containing messages of love and acceptance that can be interpreted as welcoming towards LGBT+ people**. It will create another valuable source of reflection for Small Brother, and it will keep the reflections more “open”

Another important remark concerns the ritual. Participants highlighted that it would be nice

for Big Brother to be somehow **involved in the ritual performed by Small Brothers** since it would create a stronger sense of belonging and community, which are important aspects of the Catholic Faith

Finally, it was remarked that the names “**Small Brother**” and “**Big Brother**” are **not gender-inclusive**, since the digital service is also designed for females and people who don’t necessarily identify as man or woman.

CHANGES

Taking into account the feedback of the session, it has been decided to make some changes to the digital service

-**The application will be used until Small Brothers decides to come out of the closet.** After coming out, they will be able to look for support in the real world (e.g. Catholic LGBT+ groups) since don’t need a “safe” and “hidden” space where to relate with someone alike.

-In the reflection session, **a space to upload a passage of the Bible** will be added for Small Brothers to use during the week.

-It was decided to involve the Big Brothers in a specific moment of Small Brothers’ ritual. Specifically, **on the interface of Big Brother will be displayed a bubble containing the prayer that Small Brother wrote at the end of the ritual**. By doing so, they will have a **stronger connection** in the moments of prayer.

-The names Small Brother and Big Brother will be changed in **Small Sibling** and **Big Sibling** to create a more gender-inclusive solution.

User Experience Improvements

To improve the overall experience through the app, **usability tests on the final frames have been conducted.** These were created with Adobe Illustrator, and a prototype of the app was built on Adobe XD. By doing so, it has been possible to **test the application without actually building it,** and make participants **grasp the essence** of the design solution.

Major changes have been made from the outcomes of the tests.

First, participants highlighted that having the same palette in the background was confusing since it was unclear to them in which section of the application they were. Having the same background didn't create a clear distinction between the homepage with the bubbles and the other parts of the application, thus it was difficult to understand what to do next and how to proceed. Therefore, it has been decided to **change the background colors of the different sections in different gradients.**

Moreover, the terms used in the application (e.g. Small Sibling, Big Bubble...) were unclear despite the small introductions. It has been

reported that a dedicated space for a more complete introduction would benefit users to understand them correctly and quickly. Because of this feedback, it has been decided to **add an introduction section during the first time use.** The section will focus on **explaining the different terms involved, how the application works, the ritual procedure and the material that is necessary to perform it.**

Eventually, participants reported that the vocabulary was cold and technical, thus users could not grasp that sense of friendly guidance that the application wants to create. Therefore, it has been decided to **change the language using informal and supportive words to create a friendlier interaction.**

Figure 23
Participants trying the prototype of the application

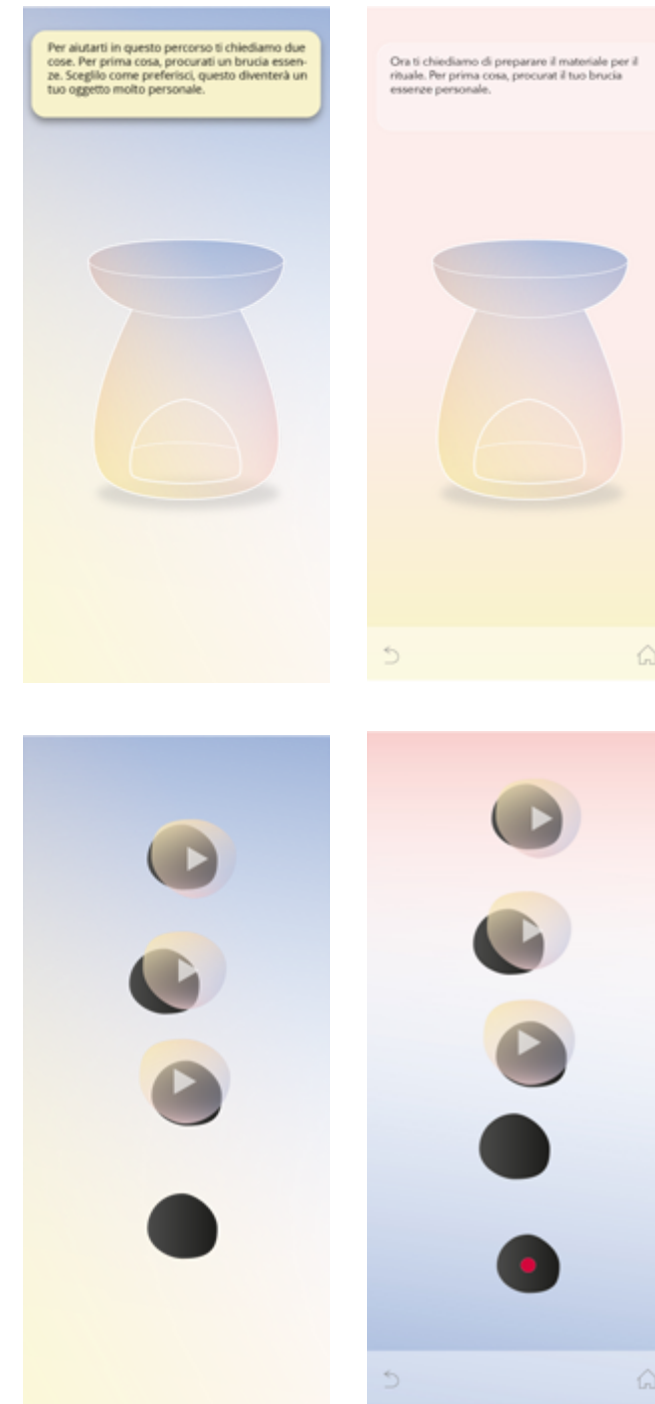


Figure 24
Examples of how the frameworks changed after the user tests

Scenario Small Sibling

A scenario has been visualized to explain how “La Corrente” works. These pages aim to describe **the most important steps for the Small Sibling during a first-time use, and how these steps are imagined to be achieved.** The scenario for Big Siblings can be found in “Appendix E”.

The app is imagined to be advertised by “**La Tenda di Gionata**”, the biggest Catholic LGBT+ group in Italy, therefore the target group will find the app on their webpage. The website is one of the first results when googling the keywords “Catholic” and “Gay”.

After the download, Small Siblings will be guided through a presentation that **explains what a Big Sibling is, the functions of the app and the procedure for the ritual.** Small Siblings are then ready for the registration with a nickname and some other personal data. In this phase, they decide **the time and the day for meeting the Big Sibling.**

The Small Sibling is the one in charge of **starting the conversation by sending the first vocal message.** It will be driven by the question “**Why do I think God loves me less because of my being LGBT+?**”. The Big Sibling will reply to these audio messages with **video messages**, and this conversation will last for one hour.

After the conversation, a clickable **Big Bubble** will appear on the homepage of the Small Sibling. This section has a **caring message** from the Big Brother, and **three folders** with different materials for reflections: **a passage from the bible with a positive attitude towards homosexuality, digital material** (e.g. books, videos, and articles), **and the previous conversation with the Big Sibling.**

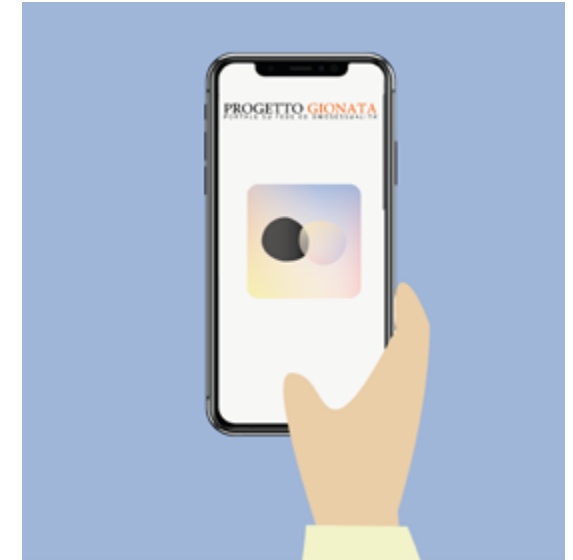
The ritual aspect starts when Small Siblings realize that **one thought they had has been**

changed through the reflection. A **Small Bubble** will be added, in which the **three sections** (“ice”, “water” and “steam”) are ready to be filled in. In the first step, Small Siblings are asked to **write the negative thought** they had before the reflection, and **remove an ice cube from the freezer and place it in a glass to let it melt.** While the ice melts, Small Siblings are asked to **write in the water section the new thought** acquired after the reflection. When the ice it is completely melted, they will **pour the liquid in a scent burner**, dip the fingers in the water and do the sign of the cross. **The water will evaporate, and Small Siblings will use this time to write a prayer to God in the steam section to thank Him for changing their opinion about that specific topic.** By completing this step, the Small Bubble has become part of the Small Sibling journey.

The journey in “La Corrente” will be represented by a **path composed of different bubbles**, containing both materials and conversations with Big Siblings, and prayers about gained beliefs. The use of “**La Corrente**” **will end the day in which the Small Sibling decides to come out of the closet.** From that moment on, he/she will not be worried about being exposed anymore, thus he/she will be able to personally visit Catholic LGBT+ groups.



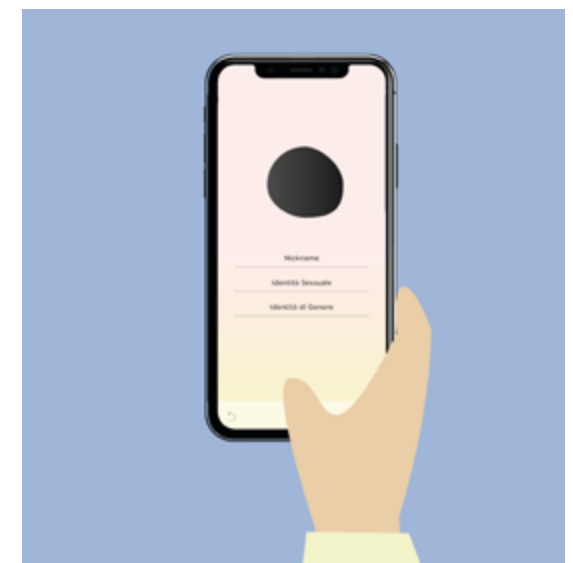
“Are there any people like me? Am I a mistake? Am I the only gay person who wants to remain Catholic?”



“What? An App that connects me with people alike to support me in this process? Maybe it can work...”



“An introduction phase. That’s great, so I can understand how does it work”



“Oh nice, I don’t have to upload my picture and I can use a nickname... I can stay protected”



“... I think Sunday works better for me. Between 15.30 and 17.30, my parents are not at home, so that works”



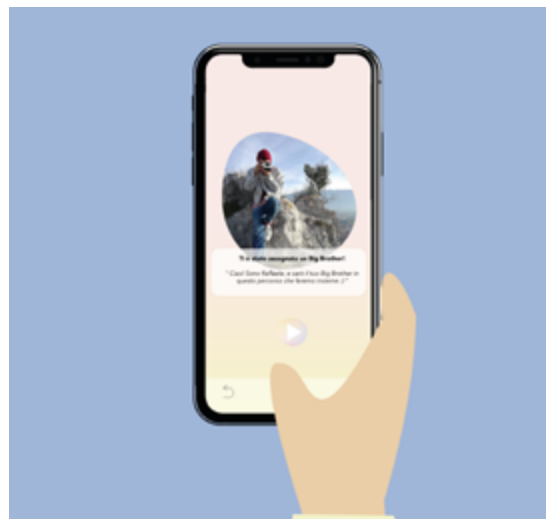
“it says ‘you need to buy a scent-burner for the ritual...and prepare some ice... an app with a ritual in real life? wow, interesting... Hopefully it’s not like in Church”



“It’s time for our conversation. I wonder how this is going to be. I’m a bit nervous, but I’m sure it’s going to help me”



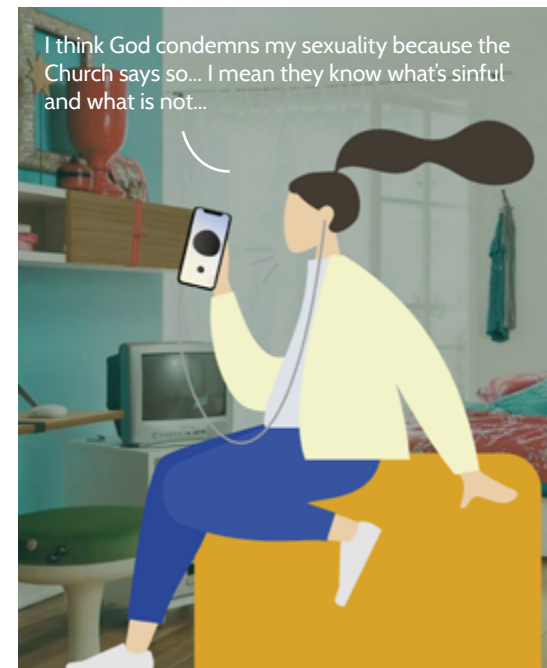
“ok... I need to record vocal messages. Easy”



“Oh! Raffaele... He is going to be my Big Sibling... Is this a video?”



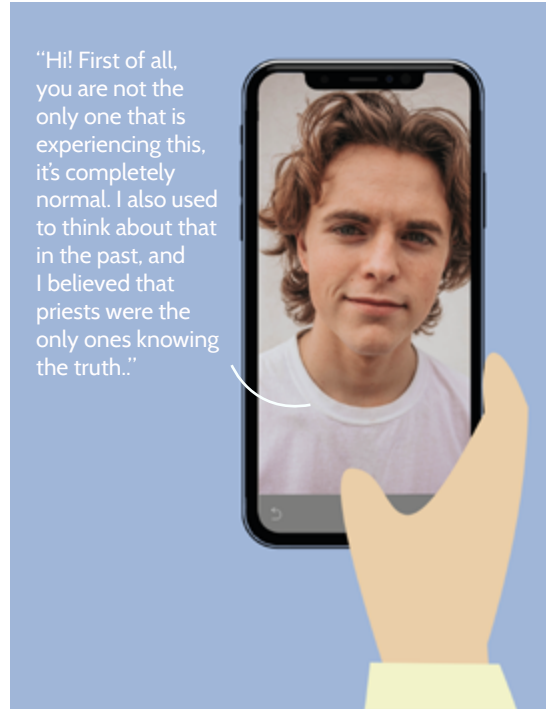
“It’s the video of his coming out! Wow, he went through a lot... These are also some of the feelings that I’m experiencing now”



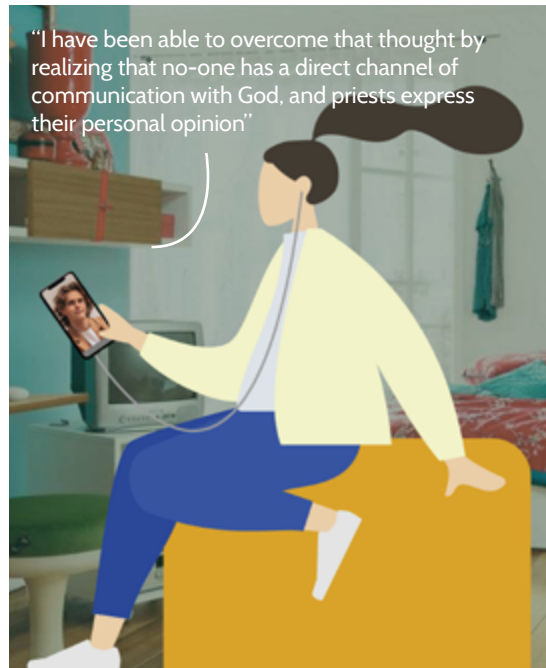
“Nice! He answered me back. I love this animation, it looks like an hug”



"I wonder what he replied to me"



"Hi! First of all, you are not the only one that is experiencing this, it's completely normal. I also used to think about that in the past, and I believed that priests were the only ones knowing the truth.."



"I have been able to overcome that thought by realizing that no-one has a direct channel of communication with God, and priests express their personal opinion"



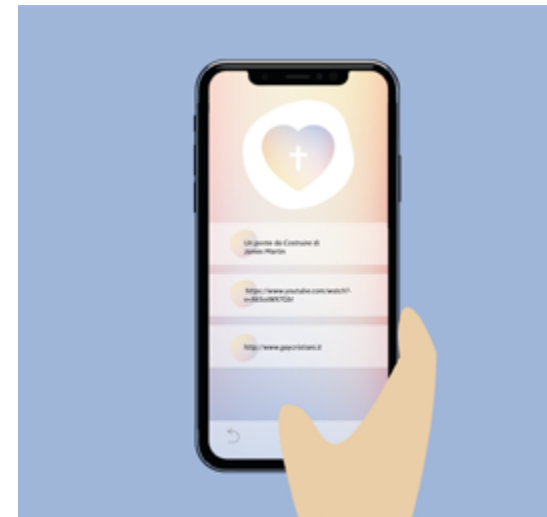
"A light bubble! It says 'this is the beginning of your journey'. I wonder what's inside"



"Ohhhh... He is so nice, he left a support message for me... So this is where I can see the material for my reflections"



"This is the passage from the Bible dedicated to this week"



"And these are the materials that I can use... wow I can not believe that this much information exists"



"And I can even look back at our entire conversation in this section"



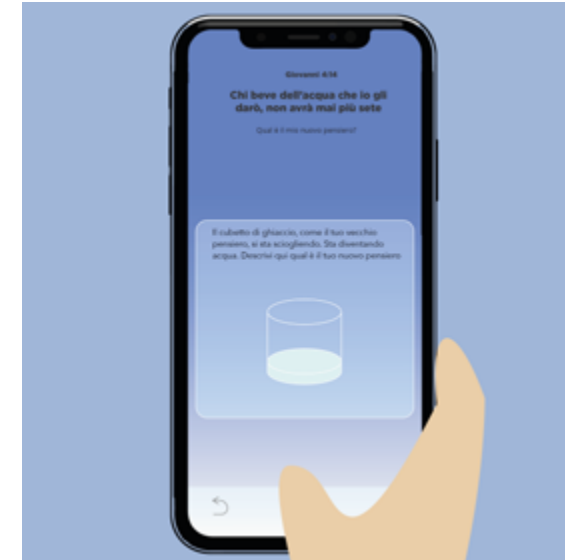
I think the conversation helped me to change my mind... it doesn't make sense that God speaks directly to Clergy members



So the app says that when this happens I need to add a new bubble...



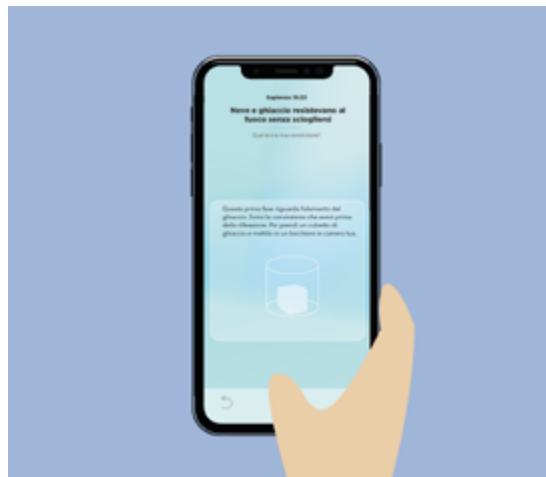
"And it says to melt the ice by leaving it in a glass in my room... I might understand the metaphor here..."



"This is the water part... So it's a metaphor for my changing thoughts! I will write here "no-one speaks directly to God, so my priest it is imposing his point of view on this topic."



Ok, so this is the part related to the ritual! I'm going to click on the first bubble.



It's the 'ice' section... Nice, they have a reference from the Bible as a title. I need to write what my thoughts were at the beginning. So I guess 'I can not be gay and Catholic because my priest says so..



When the ice melted

"I'll add my water to the scent-burner"



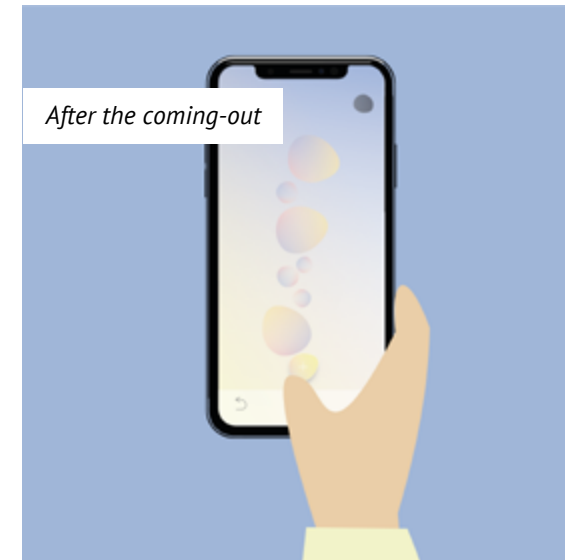
"And dip my fingers in the water to make the sign of the cross"



"The last part is the one related to steam..."



"So this is my journey so far... I can't wait to add other bubbles"



After the coming-out

"My journey is completed. I've come out of the closet, I can look for another kind of support now without being afraid of showing my true self"



"Here I need to write a prayer to God... 'Dear Lord, thank You because I've changed my mind. Thank You because I've learned that ...'"



"It looks like i've delivered my thoughts to God through the steam. It feels nice!"

App overview

The digital part of “La Corrente” contains important touchpoints for Small Siblings. The following pages illustrate **the design of the frameworks and an explanation of the most important sections of the digital service.**

This overview describes the reasons for specific design choices, illustrates how the design evolves throughout the app, and shows **the most important components of each phase.**

The complete overview of the frameworks can be found in Appendix L

Introduction and instructions

The Small Sibling is welcomed in the app with a **short introduction** that explains how the design solution works. Here, it is explained **what a “Big Sibling” is, the different types of bubbles and how the ritual works.** The language used in this part is informal and the vocabulary used **creates a sense of safety and support for Small Siblings.**

Furthermore, expressions like “Let’s start, you are not alone anymore”, or the repeated term “we” are used to **create a sense of community, and to make Small Brother feel less lonely already.**



Figure 25
Examples of frames for the introduction of “La Corrente”

First Steps

After the introduction frames, the Small Sibling is asked to register in the app. This first step is necessary to **match the Small Sibling with a Big Sibling both in terms of availability and affinity.**

Small Sibling will choose a **nickname, gender, sexual identity**, in which day they would like to meet their Big Siblings and which time slot works for them.

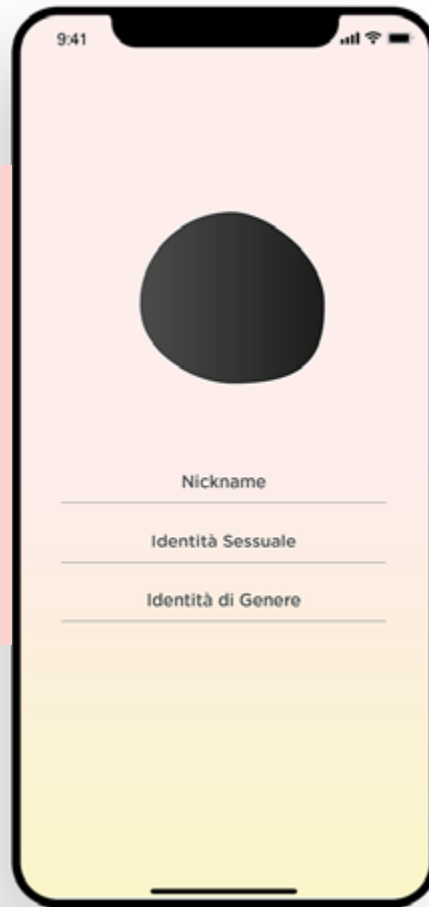


Figure 26
Registration of the Small Sibling.

Ritual items

After the registration phase, it is asked to Small Siblings to **get the objects necessary for performing the ritual.** Specifically, the app asks to buy a **scent burner and to prepare ice-cubes in the freezer.** It is important to have both objects before meeting the Big Sibling since it is

expected that they will be used immediately after the conversation. **The ritual has to be performed whenever a negative opinion changes**, therefore it loses its impacts if it is not performed shortly after a new belief is obtained.



Figure 27
One of the frames that explain to Small Sibling what is needed for the ritual.

Match with the Big Sibling

The following step takes place when a Big Sibling is assigned. Big Siblings will introduce themselves to Small Siblings with a **picture** and a **message**, and later with a video about their coming out. The coming out experience of the Big Sibling was chosen because it is **one of the most powerful milestones that LGBT+ people experience in their**

life. The video will display **vulnerability of the Big Sibling**, and by doing so, a sense of **connection and trust** will arise in Small Siblings (Mack, 2015).

Journey made of bubbles

The journey of the Small Sibling is represented by **two kind of bubbles**. The Big Bubbles appear when the Small Sibling finishes a conversation with the Big Sibling, and it contains **material for the weekly reflections**. The Small Bubbles need to be **added manually**. These are added everytime that the Small Sibling has been able to **change**

one of the thoughts perceived as an obstacle for the reconciliation between their sexuality and their connection with God.

Every Small Sibling will have a unique journey, which is going to end the day the Small Sibling decides to come out of the closet.



Figure 28
Registration of the Small Sibling.

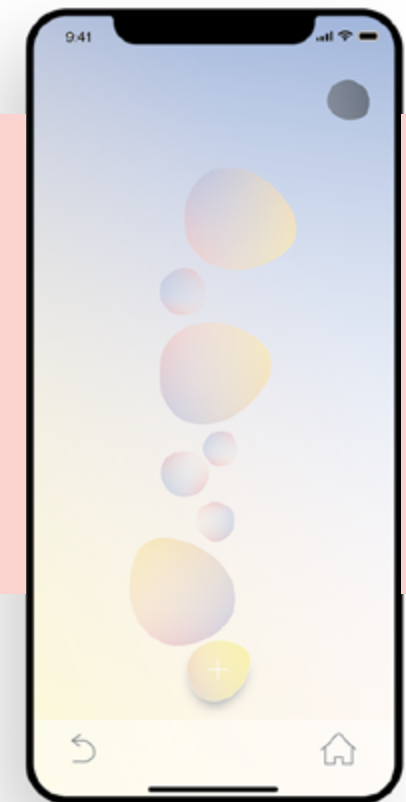
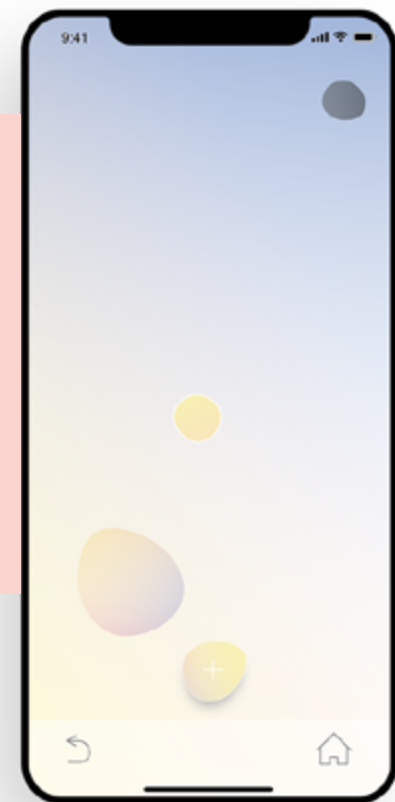


Figure 29
Journey of the Small Sibling composed by the different bubbles

Conversation with the Big Sibling

The conversation with the Big Sibling will happen on the day and timeslot decided in the registration phase. **Small Siblings will converse through voice messages, while Big Siblings will respond with videos.** The response of Big Siblings will refer to a **similar experience**, as highlighted in previous research. When the Big Sibling answers

to the vocal message, an animation will appear on the screen. **The Big Sibling bubble will “hug” the other bubble to display affection and support to the Small Sibling.** It is possible to look back at the conversation in the content of the Big Bubble.

Content of the Big Bubble

After the conversation with Big Siblings, a big bubble will appear. When Small Siblings clicks on it, they will access an interface that displays a **loving message** from their Big Sibling. Furthermore, they will have access to the **Bible passage of the week that supports embracing personal sexuality and identity**, and digital

material for personal reflections. Both will be used by Small Siblings as enhancer of the ritual. Eventually, in the last section, it is possible to **watch back the conversation with the Big Sibling**



Figure 30
Some of the frames dedicated to the conversation with the Big Sibling

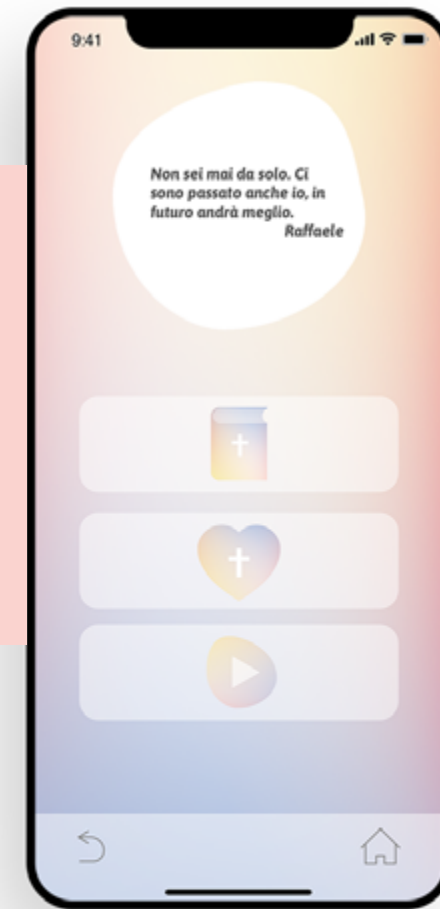


Figure 31
Content of the Big Bubble. Each symbol represents a different section

Content of the Small Bubble

Every time Small Siblings changes one of their thoughts, a new Small Bubble is introduced to the path. When the bubble is clicked, the Small Sibling will have access to **the ritual section**. In it, **three different bubbles represent ice, water, and steam**, which symbolize the thought that was changed. Every time the Small Sibling completes one step, the app goes directly to the following

stage. Eventually, the app will visualize the different bubbles in three different dimensions, highlighting the one containing the prayer as the most important. By doing so, **it highlights their new relationship with God who allowed them to merge their sexuality and faith.**

Support for the ritual

To complete the ritual part of the design solution, Small Siblings have to fill in three different formats. The first one is connected with the element of **“Ice”**, in which Small Siblings need to write **the belief that was an obstacle towards a loving connection with God**. Afterward, they need to fill in the section related to the element

of **“water”**. In this section, Small Siblings write **the new belief** they have acquired from personal reflection. Eventually, in the **“steam”** format Small Siblings will write a **prayer to God to thank Him for the new belief and the new step towards reconciliation between faith and sexuality.**

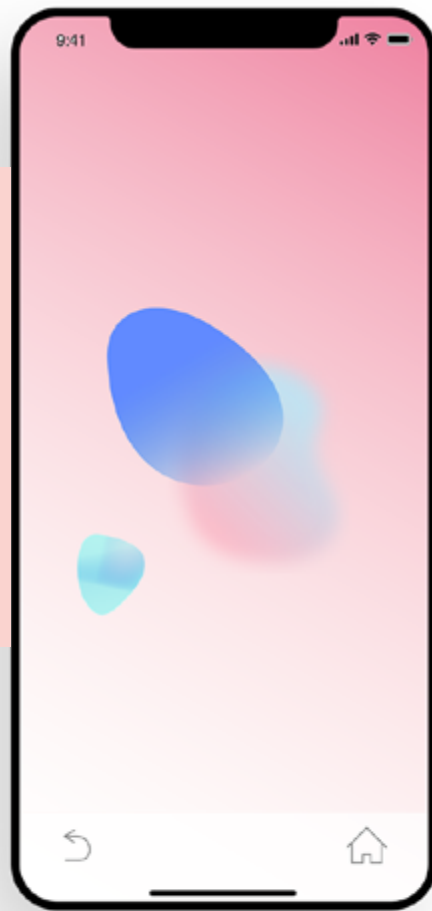


Figure 32
Content of the Small Bubble. Each symbol represents a different section.



Figure 33
Frameworks dedicated to the parts of the ritual related to ice, water and steam.

The ritual in “La Corrente”

A fundamental aspect of “La Corrente” is the ritual based on Small Siblings’ personal reflections. The inspiration from this ritual comes **from multiple ones in the Catholic world related to water** (baptisms, doing the sign of the cross with holy water...), which is an important positive element connected with **life, purity, and Christ in general**. To design a ritual based on this element, the guidelines highlighted in the methodology chapter were taken into account. In particular, attention has been given to the three components **community, awareness and intentionality, and spirituality**.

The **community** aspect is associated with **all the Small Siblings performing the ritual** since each of them creates a connection to other Small Siblings that are doing it, or have done it in the past. Furthermore, the community aspect can be found in **the relationship with the Big Sibling, who is the main source for personal reflections, and therefore plays an important role in this part of “La Corrente”**.

The aspects of **awareness and intentionality** are related to the **meaning that Small Siblings needs to adhere to each of the steps**. Since they are required to observe their beliefs and opinions, they need to be **aware of their actions and connect them to the meaning of the elements**. It is impossible to create a proper description of thoughts or to write a prayer to deliver if Small Siblings are not focused on their performance.

Eventually, the aspect of Spirituality is represented in multiple stages. This component is the least logical one, and it’s strongly related to a “magic” moment. To reach this level of “magic”, **it has been decided to use the different states of water and connect a specific connotation to each of them**.

Changing from ice to water wants to represent a sterile belief that, through observation and personal reflection, it can be altered into one usable for nurturing a more personal relationship with God. Moreover, using evaporation through the scent burner simulates delivering the message and prayer to God with the use of a medium.

During the evaluation phase, the following topics will be **investigated**:

- Is the connection between the three stages clear?
- Can we use scents in the steam stage to improve the experience?
- Is this ritual useful in the physical world? Or the digital support is good enough?



*The ice is the **negative thought** that can not be nutriment for a personal connection with God.*

*Water is the **thought that has been changed**, and now it can nurture a relationship with God.*

*The thought has changed in the form of steam: a **thankful prayer** in which Small Siblings thank God for changing their point of view.*

Figure 34
Overview of the ritual

Evaluation of the idea

To evaluate "La Corrente", **different sessions involving Big Siblings and Small Siblings have been set up.** A more complete overview can be found in Appendix H.

The conversations between Small Sibling and Big Sibling has been simulated on Telegram. This medium fits perfectly because to **connect the two people it's only necessary to know the other person's nickname, therefore no sensible data was involved.** Furthermore, on Telegram is possible to send a voice message and record videos, exactly like the designed interaction on "La Corrente".

To simulate the content of the small bubble, a Google Page document has been created. In the slides, instructions, visuals, and texts from the three different stages were prepared, and **Small Siblings were asked to fill in the document while performing the ritual.**

The ritual has been tested in two different ways. After the conversation with the Big Sibling, **Small Siblings were asked to fill in the Small Bubble content with two different thoughts.** In this way they were required to perform the ritual two times, **one using scents during the steam phase, and one time using only water.** This procedure has been carried out to evaluate whether the introduction of fragrances can strengthen the ritual even more.

After the testing, **semi-structured interviews were carried out.**

Results from the validation

Small Siblings' Experience

During the interviews, Small Siblings described the interaction with their Big Siblings as a **positive experience.** All of them reported a state of **peace and relief after the conversation.**

None of the Small Sibling experienced severe negative emotions in the moments before meeting their Big Sibling. Before the interaction, **a Small Sibling was calm and reported that exposing her problems in the forthcoming conversation wasn't making her anxious.** Another participant revealed to be nervous only about starting the conversation and phrasing the topics in a single sentence, but he didn't perceive it as an obstacle and described the overall experience as a beautiful interaction.

Small Siblings and Big Siblings could connect in a short time. One participant immediately clicked with her Big Sibling because of the **similarity in their stories and their personalities.** Furthermore, she perceived the conversation as a **moment for sharing some important topics that she otherwise wouldn't have the chance to discuss.** The similarities between her experiences and her Big Sibling's encouraged her to open up during the conversation. Another participant was concerned that her Big Sibling would not empathize with her issue because of possible differences in personalities and stories, but after the response, she had connected with him and discussed important and intimate topics.

All participants reported that seeing someone who went through the same issues is a powerful experience. One participant said speaking with a person who struggled with the same problems made her feel **less lonely.** Another Small Sibling revealed that hearing phrases such as **"I've been through that too"**, and knowing how the Big Sibling overcame those moments, made him

feel better and **gave him hope**. To him, hearing these words has been **the strongest aspect of the interaction**. Eventually, another participant said she felt relief because this conversation **changed her strict point of view and highlighted that there are several points of view on the same topic**.

The Conversation between the two people bolstered personal reflections of Small Siblings. One said she felt better after the discussion because **the advice was practical** and helped her to reflect a lot on her mindset and **untangle old thoughts**. Another participant stated explicitly the conversation helped her to **overcome a strong belief** she had between her sexuality and her faith.

Everyone enjoyed the closure with the Big Sibling because of the final message. They all said that a small message of love made them feel liked, supported and cared for.

The interaction between Small Sibling and Big Sibling was **perceived as a safe space**. One participant reported that she felt secure during the whole time. She wasn't afraid that the other person would disclose her identity since **she was talking with a person who went through the same experience of "being in the closet"**.

All participants experienced empathy with the other person. This is because **Big Siblings were not giving them rules and guidelines on how to behave**, but the conversations were focused on sharing **personal experiences and points of view about the issues**. One participant reported that the advice was better accepted after knowing the Big Sibling's personal experiences, thus after developing a connection on trust.

The video was perceived as an accurate tool for Big Siblings' answers. Small Siblings said that

using a video made clear that they are talking with a real person with a clear personality. Furthermore, video messages display Big Siblings' facial expressions, thus **their emotions**. One Small Sibling reported that using videos was reassuring to her because she could see that her Big Sibling **was not using a judgmental expression, and she could observe Big Sibling smile while answering her**. Another participant stated that she felt nice to receive video messages since she could see the other person directly, thus **the emotions felt by listening to her problem**.

The interaction between the two people is composed of different phases: the time spent to listen to the answer and then reply accordingly. It has been said that **one hour is correct for a single meeting, and the time between one message and the other is important for thinking**. On the other hand, this opinion wasn't shared by everyone. one participant said that the conversation had a lot of free time between the two parts. He reported that having only one hour was creating some **time pressure**, therefore he was more focused on staying within the time than to reflecting on the messages. According to him, **it should be necessary to either remove the one-hour limit or create a video call in which Small Sibling uses only vocals**.

"To me this was comforting, uplifting and

Per me è stato confortante, "uplifting" e leggero

"I feel good... Good with capital G!"

"Mi sento bene... bene con la B maiuscola!"

"It was strong to hear that a person has gone through what I'm going through now"

"E' stato forte sentire che una persona ha passato quello che sto passando io"

Ritual after the conversation

The ritual part has been described by participants as a **powerful moment for self-reflection, useful for untangling thoughts that emerged during the conversation with the Big Sibling.**

One participant described this moment as a nice time to **question thoughts she took as truth for a long time.** Furthermore, she appreciated that the point of view of **an external person fostered this reflection.** Another participant said he enjoyed the ritual because he could **elaborate his thoughts through the form of a prayer,** thus he could feel a positive connection with God.

Every Small Sibling loved the aspect of writing their thoughts. This process helped them to define their new points of view and detach from the negative ones. This action was described as a liberating experience by one participant.

The connections and interpretations of the different passages **were clear to all participants.** Two Small Siblings described it as a **simple and spontaneous routine, yet full of meaning and symbolism.** The three passages were clear, and participants were able to **add personal significance in each phase** since they didn't perceive the procedure as a strict set of rules. Another participant elaborated on his meaning of the ritual more than the other two. According to him, the ice represents a state of being frozen, where he cannot do anything because he is blocked by fears. The temperature and the candle represent God, who can set him free, first in the form of water, and later in the form of steam.

Every Small Sibling appreciated the three passages and doing them in the real world with tangible objects **reinforced the involvement of the experience.** One Small Sibling described the experience of the ritual as the best part of the whole test and only writing his thoughts without using ice, water and steam would have made the ritual incomplete. He said **this ritual helped him**

to get in contact with God and it was a pleasant moment of spirituality. Another participant appreciated **the titles taken from passages of the Bible** since they helped her to understand the purpose of the ritual and the meaning of each phase. Eventually, the other Small Sibling reported that this ritual would help her create a **valid moment for praying** since this activity is not part yet of her routine.

All Small Siblings reported that the time required by the physical changes of water created a **correct time window.** They did not perceive any rush or any spare time in any of the phases.

The involvement of aroma in the steam phase intensified the impact of the ritual. One participant said she was hypnotized by looking at the steam evaporating from the scent burner, but the version with perfume gave her **additional feedback that created a multi-sensorial and more poetic experience.** Another participant attached additional meaning to the perfume. She could see the perfume as a metaphor for Jesus, and the water as her. The combination of the two would create a better version of her, with better opinions towards herself and her sexuality.

“It was a liberating experience... also the gesture itself of this ice that melts... I liked it very much”

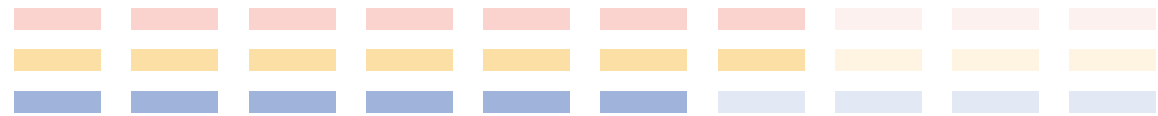
“E' stata un'esperienza liberatoria, anche il gesto in se di questo ghiaccio che si scioglie... mi è piaciuta molto”

“With perfume it has more effect. You have this other note as you write ... I really liked it”

“Profumata fa più effetto. Hai quest'altra nota profumata mentre scrivi... mi è piaciuto veramente molto”

Design Qualities

Guided



Evolving



Private



Reassuring



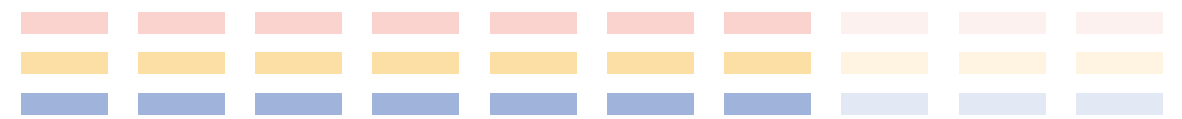
Relieving



Delicate



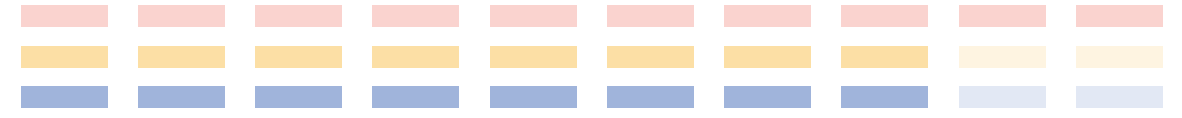
Poetic



Tender



Authentic



Introspective

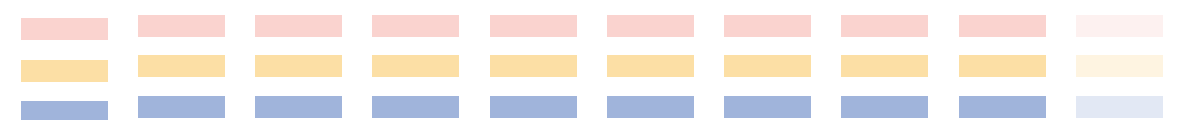


Figure 35
Participants' perception of the interaction qualities

Big Siblings' experience

Big Siblings described the interaction as a **positive and useful experience**. The conversation appeared natural, and it helped them to reflect on themselves.

One participant said that even though she didn't know Small Sibling's backstory, **it was not embarrassing or weird to talk about these delicate topics**. The same opinion has been shared by the other two Big Siblings, who added that the only concern they had was to **match the expectations of his Small Sibling**. Some said the conversation felt more like "meeting a friend you haven't seen in a long time, and not like meeting a stranger". One participant said **it is natural for LGBT+ Catholic people to bond immediately due to a need of talking about topics that ca not discuss in other environments**.

Big Siblings reported that sometimes it was **difficult to answer specific questions**, since they may still deal with some aspects of the topic themselves. However, sharing their current state and opinion about it helped the Small Siblings' mindset and **provided important points for their reflections**. One participant said she enjoyed talking about topics so intimate with someone because **she perceived it as a moment to review some of her own beliefs**. The other two Big Sibling claimed that the interaction with the Small Sibling was **promoting personal reflections** since they had to say out loud some thoughts they never expressed directly to someone and because they could also see another point of view on an important topic.

The overall conversation has been described as helpful for Small Siblings wellbeing, and **speaking about important topics was nice also Big Siblings**.

One participant said she would have appreciated **more details about the Small Sibling**. General information such as "do you live in a city or a town?" would help to change the approach to the person, and **tailor the answers according to the**

Small Siblings. Furthermore, knowing whether the Small Sibling is involved in activities related to Catholic environments (e.g. Gifra, Parrish) could help to **set up a better conversation with them**.

Big Siblings reported that **they empathize with the other person**. One participant explained that hearing the other person's voice **helped her to understand their emotional status** and which part of the conversation was given more importance. Furthermore, this created an **immediate personal connection**.

Every Big Sibling said they would **love to repeat the experience**. It was nice for them to explore the topics and to talk about important matters which usually are not discussed. According to Big Sibling's experience, **this can help both Small Siblings and Big Siblings**.

"We as LGBT Catholics relate to each other a lot when we talk about certain topics because there is a need for connection."

"Si sente molto la vicinanza tra noi cattolici LGBT+ quando si parla determinate tematiche, perché c'è proprio un bisogno di incontro."

"Being in your environment and talking about important issues without meeting in person helps to create an atmosphere of tranquility."

"Il poter stare nel proprio ambiente a parlare di temi importanti senza un incontro faccia a faccia ha aiutato a creare un clima di tranquillità."



Takeaways from the validation

"La Corrente" is a digital service in combination with a ritual that **nurtures a personal and positive connection with God through reflections on personal topics**. The design solution matches all the guideline listed in the Design Goal

I want to switch perspective of SMALL SIBLINGS from a God that condem homosexuality to a loving and accepting One by nurturing...

A feeling of guidance by building up a trustworthy connection with BIG SIBLINGS

A feeling of belonging by associating them with people alike

A feeling of hope by inspiring them by the experiences of BIG SIBLINGS

A feeling of protection by providing them a safe space to relate with BIG SIBLINGS

The results from the interviews validated these points. Small Siblings reported a **feeling of belonging by listening to personal experiences** of Big Siblings and empathize with them. Small Siblings also experienced a **feeling of hope** by having a **clear example of someone who experienced the same issues but eventually overcomes them**.

Furthermore, Small Siblings could experience a **feeling of guidance** based on **trust towards their Big Siblings** because of the mutual exchange of life experiences and private thoughts. Eventually, Small Siblings experienced a **sense of protection** since the application allows to have **direct interaction with Big Sibling without disclosing the identity of people in the closet**.

From the interviews has been reported that this solution is useful to help **change the perception that Catholic LGBT+ people** have towards their **spirituality** and their **sexuality**. The ritual phase of "La Corrente" creates a positive connection with God, who ultimately **becomes responsible for helping Small Siblings** to change their mind towards a more **accepting point of view on LGBT+ related issues**.



Further Developments

As highlighted by the interviews, the design solution had a positive impact on the target group. However, the results pointed out **some further developments** that could improve the overall experience and design of "La Corrente".

Investigating the following steps would benefit the design solution:

- Changes in the format of conversation between Small Siblings and Big Siblings
- Testing "La Corrente" for a longer time
- Testing "La Corrente" with a working prototype of the app
- Investigate the Big Sibling's experience more
- Guidelines for Big Siblings
- Matching system for pairing Small Siblings and Big Siblings

Changes in the conversation

Initially, It has been decided to create a time-window to reduce the commitment of Big Siblings and to create the audio-video format to make Big Sibling reflecting on the conversation before answering. Despite the positive overall feedback, one participant made remarks on the way the conversation between Small Sibling and Big Sibling is set up at the moment. To him, **this time limit was a source of pressure, thus he was more concerned about not exceeding the time limit than the conversation.**

Further steps need to consider this aspect and **test whether to extend the time limit of one hour or change the format to a direct video-call to create a smoother interaction.** These changes should investigate whether further changes could increase that **sense of gentle support that is expected from the conversation with Big Siblings.**

Testing "La Corrente" for a longer time

Because of the time restrictions of this project, "La Corrente" has been tested for a maximum of two meetings. The impact of this time-window has been positive, however, due to the nature of the project, **the solution should be tested for a longer time,** and investigate whether it has the same positive impact on Small Siblings' connection with God. Furthermore, testing the solution in a longer period would **investigate whether people find the interaction more "guided"**, one of the design qualities that Small Siblings didn't perceive as strong as others.

Testing "La Corrente" with a working prototype of the app

During the evaluation phase, the application has been tested in two different ways: its UX and its features. In the future, it would be beneficial to **create a working prototype** that combines all the features with the visuals of the application. By doing so, it would be possible to **investigate the impact that the complete solution would have on Small Siblings.**

Investigate more Big Sibling's experience

Big Siblings had a positive experience with "La Corrente". The validation phase analyzed their overall experience, their emotions and how they perceived their interaction with Small Siblings. However, **the focus of the project was mainly on people in the closet,** hence their point of view was not investigated as much as Small Siblings'. The results of the validation phase show that Big Siblings could benefit from "La Corrente". In the future, it will be necessary to **design more detailed interactions, define a more complete Scenario, investigate Big Siblings experience and involvement in the ritual of "La Corrente".**

Guidelines for Big Siblings

The results showed that the conversation in "La Corrente" helps to improve Small Siblings' overall wellbeing. However, the test showed the need to create **training support for Big Sibling.** Additional guidelines could strengthen the efficiency of the solution and help Big Brothers by **making the process more familiar and smoother.** The training should focus on **how to guide Small Siblings in a sensitive way,** thus teaching Big

Siblings how to support a person in a difficult moment by responding with **empathy, kindness, and respect** for the other person's experience.

Eventually, these guidelines could help Big Sibling to **reduce the pressure experienced before meeting their Small Siblings.** The training will explain to them what to expect from the meeting, and a methodical approach to be a support for Small Siblings.

Matching system

The testing activities demonstrated how affinity between Small Siblings and Big Siblings increases the impact of the experience, and therefore the Small Siblings' reflections.

Based on this, **it is necessary to design a system to match Big Siblings and Small Siblings** better according to their similarities and personalities. The system could involve an algorithm which takes into consideration **the information of Small Sibling and Big Sibling and match them accordingly.**

Additional information to consider could be Small Siblings' age, whether they live in a rural area or a city, and whether they are active members of Catholic groups, all information reported during the interviews. The extra data could help Big Siblings to **adapt their conversation according to the other person,** therefore create more suitable support for Small Siblings and match their needs.

Conclusions

“La Corrente” has been developed in a complete concept. The last phase improved the idea based on **feedback from the target group, additional research, and UX tests**. These activities suggested further changes, such as **changing the terms “Brothers” in “Siblings”** to create a more gender-inclusive experience. Furthermore, the research revealed that **sharing personal experiences** similar to the other person is one of the **quickest ways to channel empathy**. Therefore, it has been decided to use this method as the main **guideline for Big Siblings’ responses**.

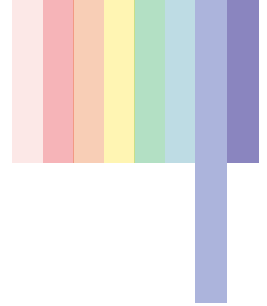
The scenario of first-time use has been used to design the overview of the interaction, its main components and to highlight the **most important steps of the final solution**. Based on this story, the final frameworks of the application and ritual were designed.

The ritual of “La Corrente” has been **divided into three steps, all connected by the theme of water**. The three passages invite Small Siblings to **write a negative thought, describe how it changed into a positive one and write a prayer thanking God for changing their opinion**. By doing so, God becomes the **main actor** responsible for changing towards a positive point, thus **the ritual nurtures a more positive connection with Him**. Small Siblings can use the solution until they **come out of the closet**. By revealing their sexuality, they will be able to look for support in the real world

without being afraid of being identified as LGBT+ members.

The solution has been **tested in the context with three couples**. The outcomes were positive and “La Corrente” was perceived as a **powerful tool for connecting Small Siblings and Big Siblings**. The ritual aspect of “La Corrente” boosts a positive connection with God, since **He becomes the main driver** that helps Small Siblings to change their mind towards a **more accepting point of view on LGBT+ related issues**.

Some further steps could be done to **improve the project further**. It would be necessary to review how the conversation between Small Siblings and Big Siblings is built, test “La Corrente” with a working prototype for a longer period and see whether the interaction qualities would be perceived differently. Furthermore, it will be necessary to **investigate the Big Siblings’ experience more**. The interviews highlighted that “La Corrente” creates a space for them to talk about topics they do not usually discuss in other environments. It would be beneficial to **design a training system for Big Siblings**. This will teach them a method to answer Small Siblings efficiently focusing on empathy. Eventually, it will be necessary to **design a matching system** to pair Small Siblings and Big Siblings according to their affinity.



CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

This final chapter shows the designer's final reflections. Here are illustrated the **strengths and weaknesses** of the process and reflections regarding themes such as the concept of God for a design project, the importance of communities for Catholic LGBT+ members, an analysis of needs for people in the closet, and the importance of designing for narratives. Eventually, **final considerations** of the designer are described

Strenghts

Qualitative research

The Qualitative research has been conducted in the context with the specific target group. For this research, all tools has been designed with the goal of discovering significant data and providing a **pleasant experience for participants**. Furthermore, the results from this phase highlighted **important aspects that were not found in the literature research**. Diving into participants personal experience highlighted **important and unconventional insights**, used later to define the whole direction of the project.

Strict collaboration with the target group

The target group has been consulted **every time an important direction for the project was made**. This collaboration made it possible to create valid directions that could really match the target group's expectations and needs.

Language

The language used to interact with the target group has always been Italian. This made it possible to **gather important information** that could have been lost if translations would have been made. **The nuances of some Italian terms** were useful in this case to understand a clear opinion of people both during the research phase, and during the testing phase.

Framework

The framework that was designed could be applied to different **target groups that feel somehow excluded by mainstream religions** (It could be possible to apply this model to divorced people). The project highlighted the importance of having access to the experience of others that went through the same struggles as the main characteristic to **find a balance**, thus wellbeing, **between two parts of personal life that seem incompatible**.

Limitations

Literature research

The collected literature research was done by only one researcher. This may have biased the whole research towards findings that **only support the researcher's focus**.

The analysis may present some biases due to the fact that it has been conducted by a single person. **The data could have been analyzed with a biased point of view** without being aware of it.

Recruitment

Since all participants involved in the project were reached though personal connection, **the results may not represent the whole population**. The research took only a limited number of Catholic LGBT+ people into account, therefore **it is not possible to generalize the results**. During this project, no transgender person has been interviewed, therefore additional research should be made to undersand if the designed solution is also valid for them.

Time

Due to the time limitations (100 days), some activities had to be shorter than the ideal situation, thus **the results may have been different with more time**.

Technological Limitation

Due to the time limitation, **it has not been possible to create a proper working prototype** of the application to test in the context. During the testing phase, the frames and the different interactions were tested separately. This **technological limitation** may have been important for the final results.

Personal Reflections

This has been the project I cared about the most during my entire student career. It might sound obvious since it is my graduation project, but this is not the main reason.

During this project, I have learned so much by managing complexity in such a detailed context, and gaining interesting reflections on the project, its process and also myself. Hereby I present the most important aspects of "La Corrente".



Need for Spirituality

For many Catholics, being in contact with God means always **having someone to help them in the difficult times**. This, as I have discussed in the literature research, improves people's wellbeing and it is one of the many manifestations for fulfilling our **need for "Purpose"** (Desmet, in press).

We can combine spirituality with other sub-needs to explain some behaviors in today's society. For instance, **faith exists to fulfill both a need for "Purpose"** (in this case Spirituality) **and a need for "Belonging"**, satisfied by relating to a religious community. It is possible to see some similarities here between Newman's model which describes how faith, religion, and spirituality relate to each other. Newman's work (2004) portrays the combination of spirituality and religion as the strongest mix and, if we associate this study to Desmet's (in press), it is because it fulfills at the same time people's need for Belonging and for "Purpose".

In my project, I worked on both needs on different levels. **The ritual and reflections** enhanced by Big Siblings support **Small Siblings' need for "Purpose"** since they nurture an idea of God who helps the conciliation between their spirituality and sexuality. I satisfied **Small Siblings' need for "Belonging"** by connecting them to Catholic LGBT+ members. At first, I assumed that detaching them from religious communities was the healthiest preference. However, the most correct direction was **finding people within that community with similar lives and experiences**.

I would not confidently say I have worked on the Small Siblings' faith, but I am sure **this project impacted their spirituality and tackled their need for belonging**. In western countries, Spirituality is becoming a smaller aspect of people's lives. However, many people perceive it as a strong need, and designers should see it as **a need that is as valid as the other ones to enhance people's well-being**.

New concept of God

During the process, The design goal of this project has been changing Small Siblings' perspective of God. However, the result has to be read differently. "La Corrente" supported personal reflection of Small Siblings and **attributed new characteristics** to the Catholic God by making Him the main actor involved in their change.

By doing so, the intervention helped Small Siblings to **get a new concept of God** since it is possible to see the God described in the Research phase as a different deity than the God involved in the ritual of "La Corrente".

People shift from a judgemental and punitive God, described by the negative statements of the Church, towards **a God who loves and accepts everyone**. This occurs based on Big Siblings' experiences and the ritual that portrays Him as the main support for LGBT+ related issues.

The Roman Catholic Church does not provide a clear description of God's behavior, therefore **there is room for interpretation**. The concept of God that this project wants to support is based on the opinion of different theologians, passages of the Bible (John 3:16; 1 John 2:2; Roman 5:8, 1 John 4:8,16) and also by Pope Francis.

Basic needs of LGBT+ members “in the closet”

After the research phase, the focus of the project shifted towards Catholic LGBT+ members in the closet. One of the main characteristics of this target group is that they want to keep their identities a secret, since they **don't want to be recognized as not-heterosexuals**. This makes it **impossible to reach them** as well as **support them directly**. However, **denying your sexuality doesn't eliminate the psychological needs connected to it**.

This project tackled Small Siblings needs for Belonging and Purpose, but other needs could be explored for future projects. If we look at Pieter Desmet's research on fundamental human needs (in press), it is possible to point out some examples of needs perceived by LGBT+ members, whose fulfillment is thwarted while “being in the closet”.

For example, closeted LGBT+ members may find difficulties in figuring out a clear life direction, since their identity is not completely defined, thus **they can not fully accomplish their need of**

Autonomy. Another case **concerns the need for Relatedness** because the fear of being labeled as homosexual could prevent romantic involvement. Another important need, that we already discussed, is the **need for Belonging**. LGBT+ people in the closet can not relate with other LGBT+ members personally, thus they can not have different kinds of support by a community of people alike. Eventually, being in the closet is harmful to psychological wellbeing, since this target group experiences the fear being disclosed as LGBT+ daily, which harms their **need of Ease**.

This shows that **being in the closet**, as a process to fulfill their need for security, **prevents the direct fulfillment of other needs**. However, it is important to support the satisfaction of these needs also in the stage before the coming out, and design can help to do so. I believe that **through design interventions it is possible to target people in the closet to satisfy their needs without disclosing their identity**.

Similar experiences: empathy and hope

One of the biggest challenges of this project was to create a **design solution based on empathy**. During the ideation phase, I built several concepts for “silver-lining” the problem, so it was clear that I needed to better understand the differences between sympathy and empathy.

My definition of empathy can be described as putting yourself in someone else's shoes, live a life experience from the narrator's point of view and respond accordingly. Through research, I've discovered that there is an effective way to show empathy: by focusing the reply of Big Siblings on sharing a similar experience, **Big Siblings gain Small Siblings point of view and validate their emotions**.

Furthermore, this response has another significant value: hearing similar stories from Big Siblings **gives Small Siblings hope for a brighter future**. Indeed, “La Corrente” shows to Small Siblings that those who combined being LGBT+ and personal faith are the same ones who have experienced the same issues.

This proves them **their struggles and suffering are temporary** and provides hope to find, eventually, an **inner balance**.

In conclusion, one of the most valuable features of this project is the **use of similar experiences, which works both for showing empathy towards Small Siblings, and for giving them hope in a moment of difficulty**.

Meanings in rituals

As highlighted by the research, **the meaning** that people attribute to their rituals is **fundamental**. In this project, I chose the meanings of each phase and I guided Small Siblings through an interaction helpful for them. While designing these steps, I needed to reflect on **how users can easily relate to a prior designed meaning**.

During the evaluation of “La Corrente” I examined whether the purpose of the three steps was clear. According to the participants' experience, **the ritual was one of the best aspects of this project**. Not only have the Small Siblings understood the meanings of the three stages, but **they could personalize these significances according to their preferences**. To me, this is the reason the ritual worked so smoothly.

Based on this experience, I would add another important guideline in my “design for rituals” approach: think about space for personal interpretation while deciding the meaning of a ritual. **This freedom creates a deeper connection between the actions and the performer, since they will provide the final meaning**. They do not perceive the ritual as an imposition. Instead of designing the meaning, it is important to design a “meaning space”, which defines the meaning but it is not too narrowed down.



Importance of communities

Communities have been an important part of the whole project. At the beginning of the process, the solution appeared to be **detaching LGBT+ members from their Religious community**, and push them towards a more individual approach to Faith. This direction was partially right since the involvement in Catholic Communities with spiritual bullying is harmful to Catholic LGBT+ members. However, the primary research showed that **communities are a fundamental aspect for LGBT+ Catholic**, therefore the solution had to consider this need of the target group.

Detaching them from their religious community was not the optimal situation since this would have just **removed a need of Catholic LGBT+ members**. It was necessary to find a replacement of the previous community with people alike, in which the target group could feel represented and supported spiritually.

It is possible to explain this passage with Pieter Desmet's research on fundamental needs (in press). By leveraging on Spirituality only, the project would have to take into account only the need for "Purpose", and ignore the need of "Belonging" that the target group was trying to fulfill by taking part in their religious communities. By offering a connection with other LGBT+ members, the project gave a better alternative to fulfill their need for "Belonging"; thus **connecting them with people with similar life experiences and needs within the Catholic community**.

To sum up, the project started with detaching people from a community to attaching them to another, **fulfilling both their need for "Purpose" and "Belonging"**.

Design for narratives

One of the main takeaways I gained from this project is **how to design stories** instead of artifacts. During the process, my focus was primarily directed to the details, while sometimes **ignoring the "big picture"**. With this project, this method was preventing me from effectively solving the problem. However, after I gained awareness of it, I have been able to change my approach. In particular, I have learned the importance of designing for stories in two decisive stages: during the **statement of my design goal** and throughout the **idea generation phase**.

While describing the design goal, my challenge was to generate a statement that could represent the complexity of the context. Despite the various efforts, I could not accurately describe what I wanted to reach because my statements were not including important nuances of the context. To overcome this struggle, I have been suggested to **visualize my design goal and describe this interaction**. This activity helped me to realize which details of the context I was missing and including them in a statement that could describe the situation properly.

During the idea generation phase, the focus on the narrative has been fundamental to produce a solution that could work in the context's complexity. At this stage of the process, I was setting up my design starting from a product, its features, and functionalities, **without taking into account the story that this would have taken into people's lives**. This was not taking into account important aspects of the context, thus the design goal. Instead of sketching products, I changed my method, and **I designed scenarios instead**. By doing so, I have been able to tackle

multiple aspects of the situation, its important touchpoints, who is involved and how Small Siblings could interact in the context.

This new project approach has been a good exercise for me since my process was starting from the detail and built a story around it. I have realized that **design brings new stories in people's lives**.

Therefore, **the designer becomes a storyteller**, since the end result is not the product itself, but the story that this product can create while interacting with the context.



Final thoughts

This project was full of highlights. During this journey, I have developed so much. First, I have learned the importance of **using the right words**. Because of the complexity of the context, it was important to **reflect on each term** used for describing situations, and to pay **attention to the nuances** that the word gives to the big picture. This might be time consuming, but it is necessary to create an **important narrative of the project**.

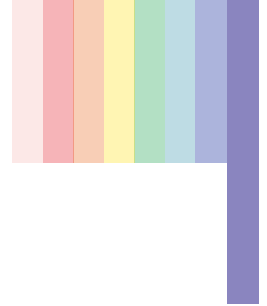
My research skills improved during this project. I have learned how to structure primary research activities to **make participants enjoy their time while being interviewed**. These activities could be considered as **micro-design projects**, therefore the same importance should be given both to the activities as **the effect that these could have on the target group**. These activities could influence their emotions and consequentially the results of the primary research.

If I look back at the process, there are steps I would have done differently. First, **I would include my target group as much as possible**. I would have loved a generative session with Catholic LGBT+ members but, since I was in the Netherlands, this was not possible. A closer collaboration could have been beneficial, especially during the idea generation phase. Moreover, **I wouldn't force myself to design complicated solutions**. In the idea generation phase, I was forcing myself to create innovative solutions, instead of checking whether I was taking into account real user needs. If I could go back, I would think less about how to design something "out of the box" and I would focus more on how to match my target groups' needs.

The experience I loved the most was the interview sessions in October for **the primary research**. I had the chance to know the stories of eleven amazing people, their problems and how they connect with their God, and I am so grateful to have had this opportunity. From their **precious experiences**, I have been able to create a project that could help other people of our community, and **this is one of the biggest values of my project**.

This graduation project has been an emotional journey and realizing that I was helping people who are suffering has been a strong experience. Probably, this is the reason I loved this project so much. **It is a project that shows people an alternative they are not aware of.**

I don't think this project's journey will end here. "La Corrente" can help people to feel better when everything seems dark. By implementing "La Corrente" in practice, it would mean to **provide a concrete help to the life of Catholic LGBT+ members.**



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