MySpace or Yours?:
Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying in Cyberspace

by
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B.A. (Hons., Criminology), Simon Fraser University, 2011

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Abstract

Few studies explicitly address the topic of cyberbullying by including the experiences of post-secondary students and even fewer studies explore cyberbullying experiences of LGBTQ students. This qualitative, exploratory study examines post-secondary students’ experiences with homophobia and transphobia in online environments. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six participants, using a grounded theory approach to analysis and NVivo 10 software. Prevalent themes include safe online spaces, cyberbullying in the LGBTQ community, discrimination through site design, use of activism to combat discrimination, and perceived reasons why cyberbullying occurs. The most common reasons relate to disconnect/detachment in online contexts, strongly held opinions and beliefs, and wider societal acceptance of transphobia. Sykes and Matza’s techniques of neutralization were applied to participants’ accounts, with four of five techniques emerging from the findings. When examining interviewees’ perceptions of cyberbullying intentions, the most commonly found techniques were denial of the victim and denial of injury.

Keywords: cyberbullying; homophobia; transphobia; post-secondary students; LGBTQ students; techniques of neutralization
Dedication

To anyone who has experienced homophobia or transphobia, online or otherwise, and especially to my interviewees. I truly could not have done this without you.
Acknowledgements

I would like to start by acknowledging the generous contributions of my supervisory committee. I mean it when I say I could not have done it without you, and I feel truly blessed to have been given the opportunity to work with you on this and other projects. To my Senior Supervisor, Dr. Brian Burtch, I would like to thank you for your prompt, detailed, and thoughtful comments and ideas throughout the entire research process. Your guidance and support have been much appreciated, and I cannot thank you enough for your assistance on this project. To Dr. Sheri Fabian, thank you for being so supportive and helpful, both on this project and in general. You have been my teaching and research mentor, and I want to be just like you when I grow up. Thanks to both of you for allowing me to explore things on my own but also providing feedback and support when I needed it. I could not have asked for a better committee, and I truly appreciate everything you have done for me. To my external examiner, Dr. Jen Marchbank, thank you so much for your thoughtful comments and suggestions for this and future research. It was an absolute pleasure to have you on my committee and to receive such helpful advice.

Thank you to my fantastic support system, both on and off the mountain. Thanks to Laya Behbahani, Amanda Butler, Sarah Yercich, and Rebecca Foley for being such fantastic friends and fellow students. Your frequent support, advice, and words of encouragement made everything much easier. Many thanks to Becky Haskell for sending helpful advice and many excellent resources my way as I worked on this project. Your expertise and research background made this process much easier, and I truly appreciate all of the help you provided.

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to follow, but I am open to the challenge! Thanks especially to Mike, who has put up
with me through the highs and lows of graduate school. You are the best partner I could
ever ask for and I am truly grateful to have you in my life. Thank you for supporting me
and keeping things upbeat, entertaining, and fun. I promise that one day I will have free
time, and I cannot wait to enjoy it together.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AFK</td>
<td>Away from keyboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCRC</td>
<td>Crimes Against Children Research Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CiPHR</td>
<td>Center for Innovative Public Health Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLAAD</td>
<td>Formerly an acronym for the Gay &amp; Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation. Now known simply as GLAAD, the organization also addresses transgender and bisexual issues and causes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLSEN</td>
<td>Gay, Lesbian &amp; Straight Education Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRL</td>
<td>In real life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQ</td>
<td>Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>An individual who is sexually attracted to both males and females (Stewart, 1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bully-victim</td>
<td>An individual who is/has been both a victim and a bully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cisgender</td>
<td>An individual “whose gender identity and expression matches the gender typically associated with their biological sex” (International Spectrum, 2013, para 6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>A term used to refer to men who are sexually attracted to other men, and, more broadly, to refer to both men and women who are attracted to members of the same sex (Stewart, 1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genderqueer</td>
<td>Individuals who do not explicitly identify as male or female (Factor &amp; Rothblum, 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender variant</td>
<td>Synonymous with transgender, this term refers to individuals who do not conform to the traditional male/female dichotomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heteronormative</td>
<td>Heteronormativity privileges biological males and females who follow stereotypical masculine gender norms. Due to misogynistic tendencies, males are accorded greater privilege for meeting these expectations (Blackburn, 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexism</td>
<td>The (sometimes subconscious) assumption that everyone is heterosexual and/or the belief that heterosexual individuals are superior to non-heterosexual individuals (Blackburn, 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homophobia</td>
<td>A “fear or hatred of homosexuality” (Pickett, 2009, p. 93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>Women who are sexually attracted to other women (Stewart, 1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pansexual</td>
<td>Individuals whose attraction to others “may be in transition, fluid, or not fully captured by gay, lesbian, or heterosexual identity labels” (Kuper, Nussbaum &amp; Mustanski, 2012, p. 251)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queer</td>
<td>“An umbrella identity term encompassing lesbian, questioning people, gay men, bisexuals, non-labelling people, transgender folks, and anyone else who does not strictly identify as heterosexual” (International Spectrum, 2013, para 17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>Individuals who are uncertain of their sexual orientation or gender identity, and who are considering one or more options in the LGBTQ spectrum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender</td>
<td>“Persons whose presentation of self does not conform to traditional gender categories” (Pickett, 2009, p. 183)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trans-female</td>
<td>“Those assigned male at birth who experience themselves as female” (Factor &amp; Rothblum, 2008, p. 235); also known as male-to-female (MTF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trans-male</td>
<td>“Those assigned female at birth who experience themselves as male” (Factor &amp; Rothblum, 2008, p. 235); also known as female-to-male (FTM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transphobia</td>
<td>“Fear and/or emotional disgust towards individuals who do not conform to society’s gender expectations” (Watjen &amp; Mitchell, 2013, p. 135)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Introduction

The vast majority of cyberbullying research focuses on elementary, middle, and high school students (Wensley & Campbell, 2012; Schenk & Fremouw, 2012; Finn, 2004; Lindsay & Krysik, 2012). Yet post-secondary students are not immune to this behaviour, nor are they immune to the resultant harms. In fact, “while traditional bullying decreases as adolescents move into university, cyberbullying may remain constant from the high school years” (Wensley & Campbell, 2012, p. 652). In arguably the most publicized case of cyberbullying of a post-secondary student, Rutgers University students Dharun Ravi and Molly Wei posted a video of Ravi’s male roommate being intimate with another man. Ravi then broadcast the video on the Internet in September 2010 and planned a second broadcast several days later. The roommate, 18-year old Tyler Clementi, discovered what happened through Ravi’s Twitter feed. After complaining to University officials about the invasion of privacy, he jumped from the George Washington Bridge a few days later. Shortly before his death he posted a Facebook message that read "jumping off the gw bridge sorry." Following Clementi’s death, both Ravi and Wei were cyberbullied, including the posting of Ravi’s home address and phone number on Twitter. In 2012, Ravi was convicted of invasion of privacy and bias intimidation. He was sentenced to 30 days in jail, three years’ probation, 300 hours of community service, and he was required to attend cyberbullying and alternative lifestyles counselling programs (Philp, 2010; The Tyler Clementi Foundation, 2013; Parker, 2012; Koenigs, 2012). Both the prosecution and Ravi’s lawyer are appealing the sentence (Ng, 2012). While this case is not the norm, it is a shocking example of how harmful cyberbullying can be for everyone involved.

In a less tragic, but still disturbing case, University of Michigan student and student assembly president Chris Armstrong was cyberbullied by the state’s Assistant Attorney General. Politician Andrew Shirvell created a blog titled Chris Armstrong Watch, accusing Armstrong of being a “radical homosexual, racist, elitist, and liar” (Kramer, 2010, para 2). He also posted swastikas, comparing Armstrong to the Nazis.
Although Shirvell posted the blog under a pen name, it was later revealed that he was the blog’s creator. Armstrong filed a civil suit against Shirvell, seeking $25,000, but agreed to drop the suit if Shirvell apologized. He never apologized and in 2012 Shirvell was found guilty of defamation of character and ordered to pay $4.5 million in compensation (Kramer, 2010; Thilman, 2012; Jones, 2012). Though the civil suit verdict is promising, it is very concerning that this case was perpetrated by an adult public figure and that no apology was forthcoming.

Although a great deal of research exists in the field of cyberbullying, very few studies specifically address cyberbullying and post-secondary students, and even fewer examine the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and/or questioning) experience. Of the studies that do, most address LGBTQ students as part of the wider student population (Finn, 2004; Wensley & Campbell, 2012; Lindsay & Krysik, 2012), rather than studying them in particular. This thesis addresses LGBTQ students’ experiences with homophobia and transphobia in online environments. The research questions are as follows: What are post-secondary students’ experiences with homophobia and transphobia in online environments?; What types of cybervictimization have been experienced and/or perpetrated?; Where have instances of online homophobia and transphobia been encountered?; and Through which methods are post-secondary students victimized?

Following this introductory chapter, the second chapter of this thesis provides background information about cyberbullying and homophobic and transphobic bullying. It begins with a discussion of key definitions and a comparison of in-person bullying and cyberbullying. This is followed by a discussion of the impact of cyberbullying as well as the devices and venues commonly associated with online bullying. Positive aspects of the Internet are also discussed. Next, homophobic and transphobic bullying are addressed, both generally and in post-secondary environments. Finally, the discussion leads to a focus on cyberbullying and LGBTQ students.

The focus of chapter three is on the role of theory in this thesis. The theoretical framework draws from sociological theory and criminological theory, especially the influential work of Gresham Sykes and David Matza (1957). Their neutralization theory is discussed, with particular focus on the techniques of neutralization. The concepts of
“drift” and delinquency are covered next, followed by a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of neutralization theory. The discussion then turns to the application of neutralization theory to hate crime and cybercrime research. The final section covers potential application of this theory to the current study.

Methods and methodology are addressed in chapter four, including a discussion of research questions and sampling techniques. Recruitment methods are tackled next, as are recruitment difficulties encountered throughout the research process. Style and format of interviews are covered, with a particular focus on a feminist style of interviewing. Next, ethical considerations are presented, followed by a discussion of data analysis. The analysis discussion covers transcription and coding methods, and is followed by a consideration of the importance of reflexivity, credibility, and authenticity in qualitative research.

The results of the research are presented in chapter five along with a discussion of the key findings. This section begins with coverage of participants’ Internet use and online socialization, and then leads to interviewees’ positive experiences with the Internet. Online victimization is addressed next, including definitional concerns, venues where cyberbullying is commonly experienced, forms of cybervictimization experienced by participants, and their responses (both personal and formal (e.g. complaints)) to cyberbullying. Emergent themes are presented and covered in detail, followed by a discussion of the applicability of neutralization theory to the interview findings.

Chapter six concludes the thesis. This section includes a discussion of the study’s strengths and limitations. Future research directions are identified, with a particular focus on online homophobia and transphobia. To close, some concluding thoughts are provided. This discussion expands on the key findings of the study and also provides a consideration of the future of homophobia and transphobia in online environments.

- Matza (1964) posits that delinquents “drift” between conventional and criminal or deviant society, and are not fully committed to either set of norms.
2. Literature Review

Jeeves: So, like, I mean it happens in person and it happens on the Internet, but what is the difference if somebody says something to you in person and somebody says something to you on the Internet? If somebody’s threatening you in person, that’s taken to the police. If somebody says something to you on the Internet that’s threatening, it’s not- you have information. But they won’t. Because it’s online. That’s why I wanted to do this interview actually, ’cause I was like, you know, I thought about it and I was like “no, you know, there is literally no difference, or at least there shouldn’t be.” I mean, there is no difference, but people seem to think that there is.

Although bullying has always been present in school settings, technological advances have opened up new venues for the bullies of the world. “Most adolescents these days have not known a time when they [could not] search the Internet or communicate with others electronically” (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009, p. 7), so it is unsurprising that bullies have taken their behaviours to this new socialization setting. Unfortunately, new forms of bullying bring with them new problems, and this has led to a lag in understanding and responding to acts of cyberbullying. While there is a current surge of research in this area, there is a need to focus on specific populations, especially those who may be most at risk for this type of bullying. Though several studies have uncovered differences in patterns of cyberbullying of LGBTQ individuals (Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012; Finn, 2004), few researchers have focused on this group exclusively. This chapter addresses both cyberbullying and homophobic/transphobic bullying, as well as the limited research that has addressed the two.
2.1. Cyberbullying

2.1.1. Definitions

There is no single, universal definition for cyberbullying (Langos, 2012). Since researchers in this field are not even unanimous about how to spell the term (e.g. cyberbullying, cyber bullying, cyber-bullying), it is no real surprise that there is continuing disagreement about how to define it (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Naruskov, Luik, Nocentini & Menesini, 2012). While some researchers argue that cyberharassment, cyberstalking, and cyberbullying are interchangeable terms (Beran & Li, 2005; Strom & Strom, 2005), others argue that this is not the case (Kowalski, Limber & Agatston, 2008). Additional terms sometimes used interchangeably with cyberbullying include cyberaggression and cybervictimization (Grigg, 2010; Lam, Cheng & Liu, 2013), although again there is no consensus whether these terms constitute the same behaviours. Further, some researchers believe that adults can engage in and be targets of cyberbullying (Kowalski et al., 2008; McQuade, Colt & Meyer, 2009; Strom & Strom, 2005), while others argue that cyberbullying applies only to youth, and that adults experience cyberharassment (Finn, 2004). Given the findings of the current and additional studies of cyberbullying with adult populations, it is clear than cyberbullying also exists at the adult level. Inconsistencies in definitions are problematic, because “to address the problem of cyberbullying, it is imperative to know what it is” (Langos, 2012, p. 288).

Despite some areas of disagreement, experts agree about many elements, drawn primarily from traditional bullying definitions. The first requirement is that the bullying must be repeated behaviour (Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Kowalski et al., 2008; Langos, 2012; Rivers, 2011; Naruskov et al., 2012). Repetition has a different meaning in cyberspace than it does in a traditional context. Acts in cyberspace can be copied or sent out multiple times by one or more individuals (perpetrators or bystanders), or posted on platforms and viewed constantly (Langos, 2012; Grigg, 2010). In today’s wording, they become a “permanent record,” much unlike more ephemeral verbal slights that are unrecorded in face-to-face encounters. Such cyberbullying actions can result in targets feeling that they have been victimized multiple times, even though it may have stemmed from a single act (Grigg, 2010). The next requirement is that acts of cyberbullying must be intentional (Beran & Li, 2005; Hinduja &
Without this requirement, accidental incidents could be included. Langos (2012) argues that intention can be best determined by applying a ‘reasonable person’ standard when examining the cyberbullying incident. Even here, there is evidence of disingenuous constructions of hateful, irresponsible actions such as spying on Tyler Clementi. Specifically, Dharun Ravi’s statement following his sentencing falls well short of a full apology and, remarkably, does not allow for the ‘reasonable person’ standard that his actions would almost certainly lead to humiliation and embarrassment:

"I accept responsibility for and regret my thoughtless, insensitive, immature, stupid and childish choices that I made on September 19, 2010 and September 21, 2010," [Ravi] wrote. "My behavior and action, which at no time were motivated by hate, bigotry, prejudice or desire to hurt, humiliate or embarrass anyone, were nonetheless the wrong choices and decisions." (Ng, 2012, para 12)

Understandably, since cyberbullying typically takes place in cyberspace, incidents must be perpetrated through information and communication technologies (Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Langos, 2012; McQuade et al., 2009; Strom & Strom, 2005). For an act to be deemed cyberbullying, it must also result in some form of harm (Beran & Li, 2005; Langos, 2012), typically emotional in nature (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). Finally, there must be some sort of a power differential between the cyberbully and the target (Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Langos, 2012; Naruskov et al., 2012). Interestingly, while power in traditional bullying situations is often related to an individual’s size or popularity, power can stem from many different sources in an online environment. For example, power can be related to technological aptitude, anonymity, or simply the fact that an individual has access to incriminating information (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Kowalski et al., 2008; Langos, 2012; Grigg, 2010).

---

2 "The reasonable person approach is an objective test that measures the conduct of the perpetrator against conduct of a hypothetical reasonable person placed in a similar position as the victim" (Langos, 2012, p. 288).

3 Cyberbullying can also be perpetrated through cellular phones (e.g. through phone calls or text messages). Internet accessibility (“data”) is not a requirement for this form of online bullying.
2.1.2. **Similarities with In-person Bullying**

Because cyberbullying is bullying perpetrated through technology, it also shares many similarities with traditional bullying. While traditional bullying may occur in the playground or schoolyard, similar acts now take place in the virtual playground/schoolyard. Several studies have found links between face-to-face bullying and cyberbullying. In their research with junior high school students in Calgary, Canada, Beran and Li (2005) found that the majority (64%) of cyberharassment victims also experienced similar forms of face-to-face harassment. Researchers have also found a relationship between both types of bullying and the existence of bully-victims. In Accordino and Accordino’s (2011) study, students who bullied others face-to-face and through technological means were also more likely to be victims of both forms of bullying. Furthermore, both forms of bullying are constantly referred to as a ‘normal’ part of growing up. “Adults may believe that children learn to be tough and resilient by dealing with same-age bullies and thus resist intervening as a way to promote self-confidence in victimized children” (Conoley, 2008, p. 218). This boys-will-be-boys / girls-will-be-girls, developmental assumption can lead to bullying of both sorts not being taken seriously (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

2.1.3. **Differences Between Cyberbullying and In-person Bullying**

Disinhibition

The consequences of online behaviours are not as readily apparent as those in real life situations, and this can lead to difficulties in controlling impulsive online actions (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). Cyberbullies are not exposed to the immediate emotional reaction of their victim(s), so they are less likely to feel compassion or guilt (Kowalski et al., 2008; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Strom & Strom, 2005; Berson, Berson & Ferron, 2002). Because cyberbullying does not always occur in real time, the time lag between sending and receiving harassing messages or posts can lessen these emotions even further (McQuade et al., 2009). This can lead individuals to engage in behaviours online that they would not act on in person (Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012).
Anonymity

Bullies can hide behind their computer screens in cyberspace, for there is no clear-cut way for victims to identify their bullies with 100% certainty. Targets may be unaware whether they are being victimized by a single individual or by a group of bullies and there is the danger of impersonation (Kowalski et al., 2008). Hoff and Mitchell (2009) found this aspect of the Internet to be one of the key reasons pre-college students engage in cyberbullying. In their retrospective study surveying 351 New England undergraduate students, 52% of bullies cited anonymity as the main motivating factor. With anonymity comes increased confidence that they will not be caught or punished (Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012). Anonymity makes it more difficult to prevent and respond to instances of cyberbullying, as victims, parents, and school administrators often have trouble determining (or proving) a cyberbully’s identity or linking online behaviour to an individual or individuals (Beran & Li, 2005; Shariff & Hoff, 2011; Strom & Strom, 2005). Furthermore, attacks from an unknown individual can be far more unsettling for victims than those perpetrated by an identified person (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009; Langos, 2012; Shariff & Hoff, 2011). Then again, the anonymous nature associated with such acts may be short-lived (Kowalski et al., 2008). Over time, most targets uncover the identity of their cyberbully (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

24/7/365 Access

Although victims of traditional bullying are usually able to escape their tormentors when school is out, the Internet never closes (Shariff & Hoff, 2011). This means that bullied individuals cannot ever truly avoid harassment unless they abstain from any Internet use and somehow avoid information being relayed to them by others (Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012; Kowalski et al., 2008). As a result, home is no longer the victim’s safe

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This element of impersonation occurred in the 2006 cybervictimization of Megan Meier, whose bullying at the hands of Lori Drew (the mother of Meier’s former friend) eventually led to Meier’s suicide. Drew impersonated a 16-year old boy on MySpace, romanced Meier and then rejected her. Drew was convicted of ‘unauthorized access’ in 2008, a crime generally associated with computer hacking (Tossell, 2008). This verdict led a sentence of three years in prison and a fine of $300,000. The verdict was thrown out in 2009 due to the nature of the charges laid. In support of the decision, the federal judge stated “if Drew is to be found guilty of illegally accessing computers, anyone who has ever violated the social networking site’s terms of service would be guilty of a misdemeanor” (McCarthy & Michels, 2009, para 5).
haven (Langos, 2012). Bullying "can occur at any time, while a victim is interacting with bullies online or not, and from any location in which portable communication devices make it possible for bullies and/or victims to connect to the Internet" (McQuade et al., 2009, p. 33). This omnipresent aspect can keep targets from ever feeling completely safe.

2.1.4. **Impact**

**School Problems**

School problems are common in the histories of cybervictims. Such problems include concentration issues, fear of attending school, school performance issues (e.g. dropping grades, and failing tests or projects), lateness, absences, dropouts, and violent retaliation (Beran & Li, 2005; Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Hoff & Mitchell, 2009). Cooper and Blumenfeld (2012) found certain school issues to be especially prevalent among LGBT study participants. Almost one-quarter (24%) of LGBT participants reported being afraid to go to school, and 23% reported that their grades dropped following cyberbullying victimization.

**Self-esteem**

Study participants often report lower levels of self-esteem following instances of cyberbullying. Examples of this include lower levels of confidence, withdrawal from social situations, development of eating disorders, and poor body image (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009; Strom & Strom, 2005; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012; O’Brien & Moules, 2013). When comparing LGBT students and LGBT-allied students in their study of US middle and high school students, Cooper and Blumenfeld (2012) found LGBT participants were almost twice as likely to have body image issues after being cyberbullied (43% vs. 24%). While individuals who have experienced cyberbullying often have self-esteem problems (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009), it is unclear "whether experience with cyberbullying causes victims to have lower self-esteem or whether youth with low self-esteem are targeted for cyberbullying" (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009, p. 64).
Mental Health Issues

Similar to victims of face-to-face bullying, victims of cyberbullying experience high rates of mental health issues (Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012, p. 160). The most common of these mental health issues are depression, substance abuse problems, and suicidal thoughts and attempts (Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Strom & Strom, 2005; Kowalski et al., 2008; O'Brien & Moules, 2013). Depression was reported much more frequently by LGBT participants in Cooper and Blumenfeld’s (2012) study. While 33% of allied sample members reported symptoms of depression following cyberbullying, 56% of their LGBT counterparts reported similar symptoms. Higher rates of depression were also found in GLSEN’s (Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network) 2013 study of US youth (ages 13-18). LGBT participants who experienced more frequent levels of online bullying were also significantly more likely to report higher levels of depression (GLSEN, CiPHR & CCRC, 2013).

Cyberbullicide

Some of the most concerning outcomes from research in this area are the high rates of attempts at and thoughts of suicide among victims of cyberbullying. Hinduja and Patchin (2009) found that middle school victims scored higher on a suicidal ideation scale than non-victims. Cooper and Blumenfeld (2012) discovered thoughts of suicide among both allied and LGBT participants, although such thoughts were much more common among LGBT participants (35% vs. 19% for allied participants). Suicide attempts were somewhat more common in the LGBT group, with 14% of LGBT participants reporting attempts (vs. 5% of allied participants) (Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012). Still, caution must be taken when interpreting these troubling results. While there is clearly a connection between the two, cyberbullying does not necessarily lead to suicide. “Rather, it appears that the toll that daily struggles, stresses, and relative hopelessness take on some adolescents is exacerbated when Internet-based harassment is added to the equation” (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009, p. 70).

The term cyberbullicide is drawn from the work of Hinduja & Patchin (2009).
**No Impact At All?**

Surprisingly, many junior high school students in Beran and Li’s (2005) study reported that cyberharassment did not impact them at all. This is likely related to the perceived ‘normality’ of bullying in general, which has likely been extended to cyberbullying (Beran & Li, 2005). It is also possible that they did not deem their experiences to be full-on attacks or essentially aggressive in nature (Beran & Li, 2005). Hinduja and Patchin (2007) found that 35% of the adolescent participants who experienced cyberbullying reported being untroubled by such experiences. Kowalski et al. (2008) found a wide range of effects experienced by victims of cyberbullying, with several individuals reporting mild or no impact following bullying. As discussed in the next section, just as the impact of cyberbullying varies among victims, so do the ways in which cyberbullying is perpetrated.

**2.1.5. Devices Used to Bully**

**Online Access via Computer or Mobile Devices**

*Email*

Described as “one of the earliest forms of cyberbullying” (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009, p. 25), email gives bullies a tool which can quickly spread information to many people at the touch of the send button. Students in Cassidy, Jackson, and Brown’s (2009) study believed that cyberbullying occurred frequently through email, with 37% of participants reporting that this is the most common form of online bullying. Hinduja and Patchin (2009) found gender differences among victims of email bullying, with female targets reporting more of this kind of victimization. In a 2007 study, 96% of female participants had experienced email victimization, compared to only 13% of males (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

*Instant Messaging*

Instant messaging (IM) “allows individuals to communicate in real time with one another via typed text” (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009, p. 32). An interesting feature of such messages is that not only can they be directed to individuals or groups who are online simultaneously, but the sender can also verify that the message has been delivered to
the recipient (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). Examples of IM bullying include sending
threatening messages, creating a cloned screen name (one nearly identical to that of a
target) to send incriminating messages to others, and sending embarrassing
photographs or videos (Kowalski et al., 2008).

**Cellular Phones**

The ownership of and use of cellular phones is increasing exponentially among
teens, pre-teens, and children (Beran & Li, 2005; Cassidy et al., 2009). A 2012 Pew
Internet Study places ownership of smart phones and cell phones for American teens
aged 12-17 at 23% and 54%, respectively (Lenhart, 2012). The age at which people get
their first cellular phone is getting younger and younger, although possession of a
personal cell phone generally increases with a student’s age (Cassidy et al., 2009).
While the initial justification for giving young children personal cell phones is often for
safety reasons, it is rare for this to be the only use for these devices. Bullying via cellular
phone includes making anonymous or threatening phone calls (Rivers, 2011).

**Text Messages**

Bullying via text message occurs in a multitude of ways. It can consist of sending
messages of a threatening or disturbing nature or sending mass numbers of text
messages (referred to as ‘text wars’ or ‘text bombing’) to individuals who do not have
cellular plans that include unlimited incoming text messaging (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009,
p. 33; Kowalski et al., 2008). Such actions can result in emotional as well as financial
consequences (Kowalski et al., 2008; McQuade et al., 2009), and often cause trouble
between targets and their guardians. This can lead to technological devices being taken
away or restrictions on the use of such items, which can cause young people to feel cut
off from their peers.

In their study of elementary and secondary school students (grades 6-9) in
British Columbia, Canada, Cassidy et al. (2009) found that text messages were not a
common mode of distribution for cyberbullying messages. Conversely, in their 2007
study of adolescent Internet users, Hinduja and Patchin found that bullying via text
messages was very common (one of the two most popular modes of harassment).
While many researchers classify text message bullying as a form of cyberbullying, there
is some evidence that this belief is not always shared by students. In their study of Estonian students (aged 11-17), Naruskov et al. (2012) found that many participants categorized text message and cell phone bullying as separate forms of bullying from cyberbullying. It is possible that students only regard cell phone bullying as cyberbullying if it involves Internet access, which is something that warrants further research attention as smart phones (cellular phones with many features, including Internet access) evolve even further.

**Photo and Video Messages**

With the ubiquitous cell phone possession among teens, as well as the increasingly sophisticated nature of such phones and their features (McQuade et al., 2009), it is no surprise that cell phone cameras are often used to perpetrate cyberbullying. Photo message victimization can involve taking covert pictures of individuals in compromising positions and then sending them out via text message or posting them online (Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012; McQuade et al., 2009; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). The same photographs and/or videos may also be sent out via instant message, appearing directly in the message or through a link (Kowalski et al., 2008). Some of the most harmful examples of this involve photos and videos depicting nudity and/or sexuality, also known as ‘sexts.’ Images can either be stolen from an individual’s phone or computer, or may be sent in confidence to a friend or romantic interest and later forwarded to unintended individuals or groups (Shariff & Hoff, 2011). Sexting can be especially problematic when the individuals in these images are underage.6

### 2.1.6. **Venues Where Cyberbullying Occurs**

**Chat Rooms**

Chat rooms are “online environments where individuals with common interests congregate to discuss a particular issue or topic in real time” (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009, A 15-year old Calgary boy was recently charged with criminal harassment and creation of child pornography after sending explicit photos and making threatening calls from a blocked number (“Calgary teen charged in sexting case”, 2013). While this is the first publicized sexting case in Canada resulting in charges being laid, similar charges have been laid in the United States for sexting cases since 2010 (“Pennsylvania court sees first US ‘sexting’ case”, 2010).
Bullying activities in this venue include exclusion and character attacks (Kowalski et al., 2008). In Accordino and Accordino’s 2011 study, sixth-grade students who spent more time in chat rooms were also more likely to be involved in cyberbullying (both as bullies and targets). The majority of participants (53%) in Cassidy et al.’s (2009) study believed that chat rooms were the venue in which cyberbullying was most likely to occur. These findings were echoed by Hinduja and Patchin (2007), where adolescent Internet users reported that online bullying was most likely to occur in chat rooms rather than other online locations.

**Voting/Rating/Polling sites**

These sites allow individuals to post pictures and descriptions associated with individuals. Once posted, other site users may rate these posts, typically on scales from one to ten. Ratings are often based on personal attributes, such as attractiveness or popularity. Many of these polls lean towards the negative, making such sites an attractive location for cyberbullying to occur (Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Strom & Strom, 2005; Kowalski et al., 2008). A popular example of these sites is freevote.com, a site that was particularly popular in the early 2000s. The site is no longer active, but common examples of polls on freevote included such categories as “Hottest girl at _________ High School” and “Fattest boy in Mr. ________’s 8th Grade Class” (Crosbie, 2003). Current examples of such sites include Micropol, Pollcode, and Easypoll.

**Blogging Sites**

Blogs, also known as ‘Web logs’, are online journals or diaries posted by individuals. Readers can post comments about blog posts, allowing the option for rude or inappropriate user responses (Kowalski et al., 2008; McQuade et al., 2009). Blogs are an ideal venue for cyberbullies who engage in impersonation, because people often disclose personal information on these sites. Such information can later be used against target(s), by either impersonating them in other contexts or making personal attacks on the blog (McQuade et al., 2009).
Social Networking Sites

“A social network is a socialization framework that links individuals through some common purpose, interest, or characteristic” (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009, p. 77). Online social networks began as tools for university and college students, but have since expanded and now appeal to users of all ages (McQuade et al., 2009). Popular social networks include Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Instagram, Friendster, LiveJournal, Nexopia, Orkut, Bebo, Xanga, Xuga, and Imbee (Kowalski et al., 2008; Jaishankar, 2008; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). Examples of online bullying on these sites include spreading rumours and false information, anonymous commenting, impersonation, and posting inappropriate pictures or videos (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

Virtual Worlds and Online Gaming

In virtual worlds and online games (also sometimes known as Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games, or MMORPGs/MMORGs) (Lam et al., 2013), individuals are represented with avatars, typically designed by the user (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). Avatars are often intended to resemble the user, but they sometimes represent the user’s fantasy representation. Games range from simple, text-based offerings for single-player use, to interactive multiplayer versions in immersive virtual settings (Kowalski et al., 2008). Bullying in these environments consists of harassment, taunting, and cheating (McQuade et al., 2009; Kowalski et al., 2008). Lam et al. (2013) found violent online game exposure to be moderately associated with being a perpetrator and a perpetrator/victim of cyberbullying in their sample of Chinese high school students. Although findings were significant for perpetrators and perpetrator/victims, there was no significant link between violent game exposure and victimization alone. This study, however, only addressed cyberbullying experienced within the seven days prior to the survey (not overall experiences), which may have limited reporting of such behaviours. Further, it did not limit cyberbullying to bullying experienced within games or related to gameplay, making it difficult to discern the links to violent game playing.
2.1.7. **Common Forms of Cyberbullying**

**Gossip, Exclusion, and Ostracism**

Gossip, rumour spreading, ostracism, and exclusion are often considered minor forms of cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007). Gender differences were uncovered by Hinduja and Patchin (2009) in terms of gossip, with female bullies more often resorting to online rumour spreading. Exclusion typically occurs in environments that are either password-protected or managed through a list of allowed members. Although exclusion certainly does occur in online environments (e.g. ignoring messages, controlling access to groups or pages, unfriending individuals and/or ignoring/rejecting friend requests on *Facebook*), individuals may sometimes believe they are being excluded when this is not the intention. This often occurs when an email or IM response does not happen as quickly as expected (Kowalski et al., 2008).

**Impersonation**

Impersonation involves taking on another’s online identity, most often without permission. This generally consists of stealing or discovering someone’s password and then altering their personal information or taking this information and using it for malicious purposes. Examples of impersonation include creating a profile for someone else, adding false or hurtful information to an existing profile, sending instant messages or emails to others from someone else’s account, and even posting personal information on message boards (Kowalski et al., 2008; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012). This can be especially harmful if the site is of a pornographic or hateful nature, as this can put the target’s safety in jeopardy (Kowalski et al., 2008).

**Cyberharassment and Cyberstalking**

There is some overlap between stalking and harassment through online channels. Cyberharassment usually involves repeated threatening or insulting messages sent to the same target (Finn, 2004; Kowalski et al, 2008). Harassment most often occurs through email or instant messaging, but can also occur in more public online forums (Kowalski et al., 2008). While cyberstalking can also include such messages, they are typically of a more threatening nature (Kowalski et al., 2008). Often viewed as an extension of in-person stalking behaviours (Yar, 2006), cyberstalking
generally includes one or more of the following: repeated contact (particularly following requests to stop); communications perceived by the victim to be tormenting, irritating, or harassing; unwanted cyber sexual advances; and threats of violence. While cyberstalking victims may encounter several or all of these, it is only necessary that they encounter one of these on multiple (typically two or more) occasions (Reyns, 2012).

2.1.8. Positive Aspects of the Internet

For All Users

Socialization and Community

While the anonymity of the Internet can be used for negative aims, it can also be used to encourage communication and socialization. People may feel more comfortable opening up about themselves in supportive online settings where there is less fear of identification and judgment (Kowalski et al., 2008; Boyce, 2010). Several adolescent girls in Berson et al.’s (2002) study reported using online discussion as a form of empowerment, as they could more easily express themselves in an online forum. There is also the ability to meet new friends with similar interests and to catch up with old friends and family members you may have lost touch with or do not see regularly (McQuade et al., 2009; Kowalski et al., 2008; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009).

Suicide Prevention

Several groups have begun to use the wide reach of the Internet to their advantage when dealing with at-risk youth. The British group, ‘Samaritans,’ provides an example of one such group hoping to prevent suicide attempts by providing safe, anonymous locations for individuals with suicidal ideation. Recently, their popular telephone helpline was supplemented with an email address, and in 2010 the group arranged for their helpline number to appear in a box on Google UK any time searches are conducted for terms linked to suicide. Samaritans is also in the process of creating a system via social networking sites through which users can raise concerns about friends or family members (Boyce, 2010). Facebook representatives have worked with several suicide prevention organizations since 2011, including the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. This partnership allows family and friends to refer at-risk users to resources and counselling. More recently, Facebook enlisted the help of suicide prevention group
SAVE to investigate links between user posts and suicide attempts. Posts under examination include those immediately preceding users’ deaths (Kerr, 2013).

For LGBTQ Users

**LGBTQ Blogs and Social Networking Sites**

While blogs and social networking sites can be used by bullies, they also provide information and socialization opportunities to users. There are several LGBTQ-specific blogs that fit into this category, including *Homorazzi*, *Towelroad*, *Wicked Gay Blog*, *KindaGayBlog*, and *Queerty*, to name a few. These sites often include personal posts, entertainment news, and information and news related to LGBTQ issues. Social networking sites include *Downelink* (a location-based social networking mobile application for LGBT users), *SHOE* (a social networking site for lesbians), and *TrevorSpace* (a social networking site for LGBTQ youth aged 13-24). These sites offer a targeted social networking experience, often in hopes of eliminating some of the safety concerns raised about popular social networking sites.

**“It Gets Better” Project**

The *It Gets Better Project* was created in 2010 by author/columnist Dan Savage and his husband, Terry Miller, in response to several student suicides in the United States. These students had been victims of in-school bullying, and many were either perceived to be or self-identified as LGBTQ. The campaign started with a single YouTube video posted by Savage and Miller, with the goal of showing LGBT teens that it gets better after the teen years. This one video is now one of over 30,000, and contributors include politicians, celebrities, activists, organizations, and students. Some of the most popular videos include contributions from Dan and Terry, *Pixar* Animation Studios staff, the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police), *Google* employees, and President Obama. The campaign aims to bring together individuals of all sexual orientations to provide support for LGBTQ youth. The focus is on showing these teens that they are not alone, and that there is a community of support and mentors accessible online (It Gets Better Project, 2012; Savage, 2011; McIntosh, 2011; Boyce, 2010).
“Make It Better” Project

The Make It Better Project was established in 2010. Its goals differ somewhat from that of the It Gets Better Project. In fact, this project was developed as a response to the It Gets Better Project. This project is also designed to provide a community of support to LGBT teens, but its focus is on making schools safer for these students now, rather than encouraging students to cope with constant bullying and harassment. The aim of this project is to involve both students and adults in making schools better places for LGBTQ students. The campaign, launched by the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) Network, posts videos made by a wide variety of individuals (students, organizations, politicians, authors). There are also online resources available for youth, adults, and the media through the project’s website. This program has far fewer videos than the above project (just over 100 as of July 2013), and is less popular with celebrity endorsers (Make It Better Project, 2011).

Research and Education

LGBTQ Internet users may also find the Internet useful for knowledge acquisition. This often relates to their sexual preferences or gender identity, and may be more applicable for questioning individuals who do not yet identify with a particular orientation or identity. Sites of interest include online forums and blogs offering a source of support as well as educational information (Varjas, Meyers, Kiperman & Howard, 2013; Hillier, Mitchell & Ybarra, 2012; GLSEN et al., 2013). Varjas et al. (2013) found that 44% of LGB high school students in their study used websites to “help them develop a sense of belonging, community, and knowledge” (p. 32) in relation to their sexual orientation. Similarly, Hillier et al. (2012) found LGB students (aged 13-18) to be very likely to seek support and information through online channels, particularly when questioning their sexual orientation and/or before being out as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Examples of information sought included sources about same-sex attraction and LGB support systems. Finally, LGBT youth in GLSEN’s study were much more likely to seek information about sexuality and/or sexual attraction (62% vs. 12% for non-LGBT participants), health and medical care (81% vs. 46%), and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (19% vs. 5%) (GLSEN et al., 2013).
2.2. Homophobia and Transphobia

2.2.1. Defining Homophobia and Transphobia

Homophobia

A term attributed to George Weinberg and/or Kenneth Smith, both American psychologists, ‘homophobia’ appears to have first been used in the late 1960s (Fone, 2000; Pickett, 2009), appearing in writing in the early 1970s (Kulick, 2009; Tin, 2008). Homophobia’s “current usage has expanded it far beyond the coiner’s initial intent, so that it is applied to any act that discriminates against homosexuals” (Weiss, 2003, p. 31). While, like cyberbullying, homophobia does not have a universally agreed upon definition (Kulick, 2009; Murray, 2009), it is often referred to as a “fear or hatred of homosexuality and gays and lesbians in general” (Pickett, 2009, p. 93). “Indicators of homophobia include negative attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and stereotypes toward individuals who are not exclusively heterosexual” (Espelage & Swearer, 2008, p. 155). It is also often used to explain orientation-based discrimination experienced by bisexual and questioning individuals (Blackburn, 2012; Weiss, 2003; Conoley, 2008). Related terms include antigay prejudice, gay hatred, gayphobia, biphobia, and lesbophobia (Murray, 2009; Weiss, 2003; Tin, 2008). Homophobic attitudes are often based on stereotypes associated with sexual minorities (e.g. gay males seen as promiscuous and feminine; lesbians seen as masculine and tough) (Pickett, 2009).

Kantor (2009) argues that homophobia can fall within six models of homosexuality, including the medical model (homosexuals are sick and in need of treatment); the religious model (homosexuals are sinners); the criminal model (homosexuals are antisocial, and in extreme cases, criminals); the political model (homosexuals are polarizing political topics, often used for political advantage); the sociostructural model (homosexuals are deviants); and the biological model (homosexuals are “genetically inferior”) (Kantor, 2009, p. 11).

Homophobia is often linked to heteronormativity and heterosexism. Heteronormativity privileges biological men who follow stereotypical masculine gender norms. Women who are stereotypically feminine are also rewarded, albeit to a lesser extent due to the misogyny inherent in heteronormative cultures (Blackburn, 2012).
Related to heteronormativity is heterosexism, or “the often subconscious assumption that everyone is straight or the belief that straight people are inherently better than those who are not” (Blackburn, 2012, p. 3). Heterosexism is linked to beliefs that homosexuality is unnatural or immoral (Kulick, 2009), it often results in exclusion of non-heterosexual persons (Buddel, 2011), and some consider it to be the root of homophobia (Tin, 2008). Although homophobic beliefs are often presumed to exist only among heterosexuals, they are also present in homosexual populations (Fone, 2000; Pickett, 2009). This is referred to as internalized or manifested homophobia (Pickett, 2009; DeLonga et al., 2011). While recent political movements in North America (such as the legalization of gay marriage throughout Canada and in twelve States) are promising, and appear to indicate greater societal acceptance of homosexuality, homophobia has by no means disappeared (Fone, 2000; Burtch, Pescitelli & Haskell, in press).

**Transphobia**

Although LGBT students usually are categorized together as ‘sexual minority’ students, the ‘T’ is really quite different from the ‘LGB.’ (Johnson, Oxendine, Taub & Robertson, 2013, p. 56)

While homosexuality and bisexuality relate, in part, to sexual orientation, transgender relates to gender roles and identities (Nagoshi et al., 2008). One of the reasons transgender is often subsumed under the wider LGB category is likely because transgender has only been distinguished from homosexuality within the past century. In fact, “until the 1950s, those now called ‘transgender’ were classified as homosexuals” (Weiss, 2003, p. 35). ‘Transgender’ was established in the 1960s, but did not become widely used until the late 1970s and early 1980s (Pickett, 2009). The term was initially intended to cover only transsexuals who had not undergone reassignment surgery or hormone therapy, although it now is used to refer to any gender variant persons (Weiss, 2003; Pickett, 2009). Today, transgender “usually refers to persons whose presentation of self does not conform to traditional gender categories” (Pickett, 2009, p. 183). Individuals identifying as transgender may include transsexuals, transvestites, cross-

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7 While sex (male or female) is biologically determined, gender is generally viewed as being a social construction. “Gender thus differs from sex in that it is social and cultural in nature rather than biological” (Marchbank & Letherby, 2007, p. 10).
dressers, drag queens, drag kings, feminine males, and masculine females (Weiss, 2003; Pickett, 2009; Tin, 2008; Alexander & Yescavage, 2003; Nagoshi et al., 2008; Watjen & Mitchell, 2013). Similarly, the ‘transgender spectrum’ includes “androgynous, gender nonconforming, genderqueer, transfeminine, transmasculine, and transgender” (Beemyn, 2012, p. 504) individuals.

Transphobia is described as the “fear and/or emotional disgust towards individuals who do not conform to society’s gender expectations” (Watjen & Mitchell, 2013, p. 135). While some researchers apply the term homophobia to trans individuals (Kulick, 2009; Blackburn, 2012), arguing that homophobia is applicable to any non-heterosexual or non-heteronormative persons, experiences of the trans community are unique and deserve separate consideration. While experiences of discrimination may share some commonalities with homophobia (Watjen & Mitchell, 2013; Tin, 2008), transphobic victimization is more likely to include physical and verbal abuse, and comments expressing contempt, repulsion, and suppression (Tin, 2008). Transgender individuals are also more likely to experience institutional prejudice (Tin, 2008). Although transphobia is often expressed by the heterosexual community, it is also sometimes perpetrated by members of the LGB community (Dreschsler, 2003; Weiss, 2003). “Heterosexism against … transgenders exists not only in the straight community, but in the gay and lesbian community as well” (Weiss, 2003, p. 29).

2.2.2. **Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying**

In Haskell’s 2008 research about homophobia and transphobia in British Columbia high schools, it became clear that bullying was much more likely to present itself in subtle forms (Haskell, 2008; Haskell & Burtch, 2010). Although the incidents that seem to show up most frequently in the media involve physical violence, few participants reported having experienced physical forms of harassment, whether as victims or bystanders (Haskell, 2008; Haskell & Burtch, 2010). Examples of subtler forms of harassment include verbal harassment, vandalism/graffiti, property damage, use of derogatory language, rumour-spreading and gossip, expression of offensive opinions in classroom settings, and exclusion/avoidance (Haskell, 2008; Haskell & Burtch, 2012; Taylor et al., 2011).
Although physical forms of bullying were more common in Rivers’ (2011) research on former victims of homophobic bullying in U.K. schools, verbal bullying and subtle bullying were still the most commonly reported forms. The most frequently experienced types of bullying were name-calling and teasing, but other examples include exclusion and public ridicule (Rivers, 2011). When examining homophobic bullying in adulthood (in occupational and educational settings) subtle forms of harassment were the most common (Rivers, 2011). Although verbal harassment was the most reported type, respondents also mentioned damage or theft of possessions, nasty stares, and isolation/exclusion (Rivers, 2011).

2.2.3. Homophobia and Transphobia in Post-Secondary Environments

Homophobia and Transphobia in College and University Settings

Research on homophobia and transphobia in post-secondary institutions has most often been conducted in the United States and the United Kingdom. Studies have generally neglected to focus on the ‘T’ (transgender) in LGBT (Beemyn, 2012), often examining only discrimination encountered by gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. The bulk of research has focused on anti-homosexual attitudes of heterosexual post-secondary students. In their study of anti-gay attitudes of US college students in business and psychology courses, Cotten-Huston and Waite (1999) found that one-time in-class interventions (including viewing a Gay Pride Day video and bringing in gay and lesbian guest speakers to answer questions) were largely ineffective in influencing attitudes towards homosexuality. Predictors of lower anti-gay beliefs included having a close acquaintance from the LGB community, as well as the presence of liberal and/or egalitarian political beliefs. Strength of religious conviction was related to higher levels of anti-gay attitudes.

Chonody, Siebert, and Rutledge (2009) undertook a similar study with undergraduate and graduate students in human sexuality courses at a US university. Surveys were administered at the beginning and end of the semester to determine whether beliefs had changed. At the end of the semester, decreases in negative attitudes towards gays and lesbians were found among male students and those in committed/married relationships. Increases in negative attitudes were found among
participants who were parents. Contrary to Cotten-Huston and Waite’s (1999) findings, no significant relationships were found with religious attendance and/or affiliation and anti-gay bias.

Finally, Jayakumar (2009) also looked at sexual prejudice among university students in the US in a four-year longitudinal project. When considering attitudes towards the LGB population, the majority of students (75%) had higher levels of acceptance in their final year of university. For students who reported high levels of sexual prejudice as freshmen, two out of three reported higher levels of acceptance in their senior year. Diversity coursework played a large role in greater acceptance, as did background, pre-college characteristics (e.g. student attitudes and experiences, political beliefs).

In Sullivan’s (2012) examination of danger, risk, and safety in a university setting, 26 queer University of British Columbia students were interviewed about their on-campus experiences. Students identified safe, unsafe, and never before visited spaces at the Vancouver campus. Spaces often deemed safe and/or queer-friendly included the Student Union Building, the Student Services building, and three specific departments (Gender and Women’s Studies, Sociology, and Anthropology). Several recreational and social locations were also included in the safe space category. The most commonly avoided area was the Greek Village (site to all on-campus fraternities and sororities), with 73% of participants holding negative views of such groups. Fraternities and sororities were often viewed as an extension of high school, with a strong focus on hegemonic masculinity and femininity. A second unsafe setting identified by many participants was one of several campus pubs. This pub was described as attracting a heteronormative crowd, often including members of fraternities, sororities, and athletic teams. Several interviewees feared experiencing homophobia at the pub and thus avoided this setting. While students did report avoiding certain spaces, the majority of participants felt very safe (54%) or pretty safe (31%) on campus.

In an American study of subtle forms of homophobia, Woodford, Howell, Silverchanz, and Yu (2012) addressed the problem of heterosexist language in college settings, focusing specifically on the popular phrase ‘that’s so gay’ as well as wider use of the term ‘gay’ in a derogatory fashion. LGB students were surveyed about their
experiences with such language on campus within the last 12 months. Although almost all (9 out of 10) participants reported hearing it at least once (with 47% hearing it more than 10 times), very few participants used the term themselves (under 20%). Students who heard the phrase most often reported often feeling left out, as well as experiencing appetite problems and headaches. Woodford et al. (2012) believe that the common use of such terms, particularly in school settings, has likely led to a degree of desensitization among LGB students, and that the findings indicate high levels of resiliency among their sample.

Though many post-secondary studies of discrimination focus heavily on LGB students, two studies addressed transgender students. Nagoshi et al. (2008) surveyed undergraduate psychology students at Arizona State University to examine gender differences in transphobia and homophobia. It was important to the researchers to include transphobia for “while there is an established literature on homophobia, transphobia is still an understudied area” (Nagoshi et al., 2008, p. 522). Male students’ scores on both homophobia and transphobia were significantly higher than females in the study, and this was most often related to conservative beliefs and support of social norms. Female participants with high levels of transphobia also reported similar beliefs, but such beliefs were not significant for homophobic female participants. Homophobic and transphobic males were also significantly more likely to report high levels of aggression and masculinity.

In a UK study, Ellis (2009) surveyed 291 LGBT students from 42 universities about their university experiences. The most common forms of victimization were offensive comments and verbal harassment/threats. Homophobia and transphobia most often occurred in public places (e.g. cafeteria, Student Union building, residence halls). ‘Other students’ were overwhelmingly the primary source of discrimination (76%), although there were also some instances where participants were unaware of the perpetrator’s identity. Much of the discrimination was carried out by student groups, particularly religious organizations, and many encountered homo and/or transphobia within their friendship networks (29%). Although homophobic and transphobic events were commonly experienced, the majority of participants believed that on-campus anti-LGBT attitudes were uncommon (55%). Most believed that the chances of homophobic or transphobic harassment were low (79%), and a large majority feel comfortable being
open on campus about sexual orientation or gender identity (78%). While this may have been true at the time of the survey, close to 50% of participants had previously concealed their orientation or identity, and 41% had at some point avoided disclosure of LGBT identity or orientation to university educators or administration. Discomfort with sharing this information generally related to fear of intimidation or negative responses.

Transphobia in the Workplace

One area in which trans adults experience transphobia is in work settings. Since people tend to spend a great deal of time at work, there is great potential for victimization in these environments. Dispenza, Watson, Chung, and Brack (2012) focused on career-related discrimination in their qualitative study of female-to-male transgender adults in the United States. Findings indicate that participants were often exposed to ‘microaggressions;’ that is, subtle forms of discrimination in the workplace (e.g. nonverbal exchanges). Many participants also spoke of discrimination from members the LGB community, both at work and outside of work. Discrimination was commonly experienced within the trans community as well, and several interviewees reported feeling oppressed by male-to-female transgender persons. Institutional discrimination was also very common, with participants describing prejudicial health care and government policies that affected workplace benefits and pensions. Housing and educational discrimination were described as non-workplace forms of institutional transphobia. Reactions to career-related transphobia included high levels of stress, withdrawal, and depression. Participants often coped with discrimination and its results through support groups, counselling, and outside interests (e.g. research, advocacy, artistic expression).

2.2.4. Homophobia in Online Contexts

Research focusing exclusively on homophobia and/or transphobia in online contexts is currently lacking. There is, however, some research addressing homophobia as one component of wider online prejudice. For example, Kian, Clavio, Vincent, and Shaw’s (2011) examination of postings on American football message boards addresses the role of hegemonic masculinity on such sites. In this study, both sexist and homophobic posts were examined. Although message threads rarely had a strictly
prejudicial focus, there was an overwhelming presence of homophobic name-calling on discussion threads of all topics. Commonly posted terms included ‘faggot,’ ‘pussy,’ ‘queer’, and ‘bitch.’ Negatively-charged references to homosexual sex acts and gay men were also very common, regardless of board topic. Anti-gay rants and innuendo were quite prevalent. While other forms of prejudice were also present on the boards, homophobic and sexist comments were the least likely forms of discrimination to receive any backlash (racist posts were often responded to by angry board members). The findings are particularly troubling given the off-topic nature of such posts, suggesting that these comments are often intended to insult or emasculate seemingly heterosexual individuals.

2.3. Cyberbullying and Post-secondary Students

Several researchers have examined cyberbullying experiences of post-secondary students. Experiences examined have been both recent and retrospective. “Cyberbullying is especially relevant for this age group since they are typically just out of high school where cyberbullying is still prevalent, and they are more independent from parental influences” (Schenk & Fremouw, 2012, p. 26). In a study of Turkish college students, Dilmaç (2009) found many more victims than perpetrators of cyberbullying (55.3% vs. 22.5%). Female students reported higher levels of online victimization, while male students were more likely to be cyberbullies. Cyberbullying incidents only had to occur once in a participant’s lifetime, however, and this low threshold likely exaggerated the results. Schenk and Fremouw’s (2012) study of US college students found an 8.6% rate of cyberbully victimization. This low rate is likely due to definitional considerations; that is, participants were only considered a victim if they reported at least four instances of cybervictimization. Victims were more likely than non-victims to experience frustration, depression, stress, and concentration difficulties. Female victims were more likely to engage in avoidance as a coping mechanism, staying off the Internet and limiting cell phone use. Conversely, the preferred coping strategy among male victims was substance abuse.

In their study of cyberbullying on a US university campus, Walker, Sockman, and Koehn (2011) found that 54% of respondents knew someone who had been
cyberbullied, and 11% reported experiencing cyberbullying themselves while at university. Cyberbullying was most often experienced through Facebook, cell phones, and instant messaging. Students reported feeling hurt, upset, or angry following cyberbullying incidents. “Interestingly, 30% or more students indicated they had experienced incidents of undesirable and obsessive communication” (Walker et al., 2011, p. 36), which fit within the cyberbullying definition provided by the survey. Since this rate is much higher than the participant reported rate of cyberbullying, there is some concern about cyberbullying terminology (especially given the fact that a definition was provided).

2.4. Cyberbullying and LGBTQ Students

As noted earlier, while some studies have included LGBTQ participants, very few focus on this group specifically. All other studies in this area focus on a larger group of students or participants that happens to include several LGBTQ individuals. Furthermore, even though several studies include questions related to homophobic or transphobic bullying, participants may not fully understand the terminology or definitions associated with such bullying. For example, Cassidy et al. (2009) asked questions about sexual orientation-based bullying in their study of student cyberbullying. In the open-ended responses, very few students believed gay or lesbian students were likely to be cyberbullied. The authors believe this may be due to the casual overuse of the term ‘gay’ among students of this age group, which may not be perceived as offensive by observers or perpetrators. Based on these results, the researchers believe that sexual minority students are not necessarily targeted in greater number by cyberbullies, indicating that “victims are not only those students from marginalized groups” (Cassidy et al., 2009, p. 399).

2.4.1. Cyberbullying and LGBTQ High School Students

In one of the few studies to date that explicitly addresses both cyberbullying and LGBT youth, Cooper and Blumenfeld (2012) found similar rates of cyberbullying victimization among American LGBT and allied youth (aged 11-18) in terms of bullying based on race/ethnicity and biological sex. LGBT individuals, however, were much more
likely to be cyberbullied for reasons related to their sexual (60% vs. 8%) or gender (41% vs. 17%) identity. LGBT participants were also more likely to receive messages of a threatening or intimidating nature (21% vs. 7%). Although both groups reported experiencing negative emotional responses following cyberbullying victimization, they were felt most strongly by the LGBT group. Rates of depression were higher as were rates of suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts. These findings are all the more concerning given “that allied youth may more than likely be cyberbullied at higher rates than non-LGBT-allied youth because of their connection and identification with gay-straight alliances” (Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012, p. 164), suggesting that these discrepancies may be even more glaring if non-allied heterosexual students were considered.

In their study of 18 American LGB adolescents (grades 9-12), Varjas et al. (2013) examined technology use and cybervictimization through semi-structured interviews. The most commonly accessed online locations were social networking sites (94%), instant messaging (67%), and chat rooms or blogs (56%). 94% of participants reported experiencing cyberbullying, with the majority believing that their sexual orientation was the reason for cybervictimization (61%). The majority of victimization experienced was ‘electronic verbal’ or written forms of victimization (78% in total, for both kinds of victimization). This often occurred in chat rooms, on social networking sites, or through instant messages. Nonverbal actions, such as receiving a virus or having pictures or posts destroyed or stolen, were also common (44%). Exclusionary practices (e.g. lists excluding non-heterosexual adolescents, or inclusion of names on negative lists) were experienced 50% of the sample. Several participants (39%) reported using the Internet to victimize others, with electronic verbal threats and comments being the most common form (28%). Respondents reported engaging in such behaviour most often when they were being bullied themselves, often seeing it as a way to fight back or cope.

GLSEN conducted an online study of both LGBT and non-LGBT US youth (ages 13-18), with a particular focus on 1,960 LGBT participants. LGBT participants reported much higher levels of online bullying and harassment within the previous year (42% vs. 15% for non-LGBT youth). LGBT students also experienced higher rates of bullying via text message (27% vs. 13%). “Nearly three in four respondents (71%) in this study reported having been bullied specifically because of their sexual orientation, gender
expression, or both in the past year” (GLSEN et al., 2013, p. 8). LGBT participants also reported much higher rates of sexual harassment than their non-LGBT peers, both online (32% vs. 8%) and through text messaging (25% vs. 8%) (GLSEN et al., 2013).

2.4.2. Cyberbullying and LGBTQ Post-secondary Students

In a survey of online harassment at the University of New Hampshire, Finn (2004) found higher rates of email harassment among sexual minority-identified participants. They were more than twice as likely as their heterosexual counterparts to receive repeated threatening emails from strangers (31% vs. 15%) and were also much more likely to continue receiving such emails after requesting that the sender desist (38% vs. 13%). These findings were only significant for stranger-perpetrated harassment; no significant differences were found for similar acts engaged in by significant others or acquaintances. Harassment via instant messaging was also found to be unrelated to sexual orientation. Finn concludes that “further research is needed to better understand the similarities and differences in the extent and nature of online harassment targeted at GLBT students” (Finn, 2004, p. 480). In a re-examination of this study at Arizona State University, Lindsay and Krysik (2012) did not find LGBT students’ stated sexual orientation to be linked to more frequent experiences of online harassment.

In an Australian study, Wensley and Campbell (2012) investigated heterosexual and non-heterosexual university students’ experiences with cyberbullying. The participants - 528 undergraduates enrolled in a first year psychology course - were asked about involvement in cyberbullying within the last 12 months. Compared to their heterosexual peers, non-heterosexual women were significantly more likely to be both victims (30% vs. 17%) and perpetrators (12% vs. 3%) of face-to-face bullying, while non-heterosexual men were significantly more likely to be victims of cyberbullying (18% vs. 7% for heterosexual males). Overall rates of cyberbullying in this study were comparable to those found in middle and high school settings, suggesting that cyberbullying continues to be a problem experienced by post-secondary students.

The strong presence of subtle homophobic and transphobic harassment in high schools and continuing presence in post-secondary settings is quite troubling, especially
since the Internet provides a wider context in which to perpetrate similar forms of bullying. If homophobia and transphobia are this prevalent in face-to-face contexts, there is a strong possibility that it is even more common on the Internet, where anonymity and disinhibition may further encourage such behaviour. Although several of the aforementioned studies discuss the overlap of online bullying and LGBTQ young adults, very few have focused on this topic exclusively. Further, the studies conducted to date have been entirely or predominantly quantitative in nature (Varjas et al., 2013). As both cyberbullying and homophobic/transphobic bullying have become quite popular topics in academia recently, it is surprising that more research has not addressed the co-occurrence of these topics. To properly understand and research the phenomena of cyberbullying, it is important to also examine theories that may assist in explaining such behaviours. The next chapter addresses the role of criminological theory in the current study, examining neutralization theory and its role in cyber research.
3. **Homophobic and Transphobic Cyberbullying and Criminological Theory**

“Experience without theory is blind, but theory without experience is mere intellectual play” - Immanuel Kant

Theory plays a key role in research, and research plays a major role in theory development. Some research is undertaken to support or refute existing theories, and other research helps to build new theories or adapt existing ones. A number of researchers have a specific theory in mind prior to collecting data, and use this theory to guide the research. Others let the theory emerge from the research findings, allowing the data to determine the most applicable theory. While theory is important to research, it is a mistake to force findings into a box in which they cannot fit. Qualitative research is unpredictable, and thus it is difficult to know whether research findings will fit within a pre-established theory. Furthermore, having a theory in mind at the outset of a project can influence which questions are asked and which topics are accorded the most attention. While this is not in and of itself harmful, having a pre-selected theory would not have been well-suited for the purposes of this exploratory study. With that in mind, a grounded theory approach was used (see chapter 4, *Research Methods*, for additional information), and the following theory emerged as the best fit for the interview data.

3.1. **Neutralization Theory**

Drift is a gradual process of movement, unperceived by the actor, in which the first stage may be accidental or unpredictable from the point of view of any theoretic frame of reference, and deflection from the delinquent path may be similarly accidental or unpredictable. (Matza, 1964, p. 29)

After examining participants’ accounts and analyzing emergent themes, several aspects of neutralization theory appeared to be relevant to the findings. Neutralization
theory involves two key concepts: Sykes and Matza's (1957) techniques of neutralization and Matza's (1964) later theory of drift and delinquency. Each of these concepts will be addressed, followed by a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of neutralization theory, as well as where it sits more broadly among other criminological theories. Next, studies of neutralization theory are considered, including hate crime and cybercrime studies. Finally, the chapter closes with a discussion of neutralization theory and the current study.

3.1.1. Techniques of Neutralization

Initially designed as a critique of and response to subcultural theories (especially Albert K. Cohen's subculture theory) (Williams & McShane, 2010), Sykes and Matza (1957) developed a theory to explain delinquency without relying on counter-cultural explanations. They also took issue with the heavy reliance on class structure to explain juvenile criminality, often neglecting non-lower-class youth in their explanations (Cullen & Agnew, 2011; Williams & McShane, 2010). Sykes and Matza (1957) argue that delinquents from all social classes can engage in criminal behaviour while still obeying many of the respected norms of society. Although delinquents may subscribe to and respect these norms on an everyday basis, when committing criminal acts they must reconcile these acts with associated norm violations. Sykes and Matza (1957) called these tactics ‘techniques of neutralization’ which “allow individuals to neutralize and temporarily suspend their commitment to societal values, thus providing the freedom to commit delinquent acts” (Williams & McShane, 2010, p. 153). These excuses are presumed to be employed prior to the commission of delinquent acts (Cullen & Agnew, 2011). Neutralizations fall into five forms: denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of the victim, condemnation of the condemners, and appeal to higher loyalties.

Cohen argued that delinquent subcultures were found in lower-class areas, with subcultural values supporting crime and cruelty. Delinquent youths know no different, and are socialized to believe in and support the norms of such subcultures. Because youth in lower-class areas are unable to easily meet the goals set by middle-class society, an alternative set of values is introduced. These values are in opposition to those of conventional society, and generally relate to criminality, deviance, and gang activities (Lilly, Cullen & Ball, 2007; Miller, 1958).

Counter-cultures are generally considered to be those who support values in conflict with those of the middle-class or wider society (Lilly et al., 2007).
Denial of Responsibility

Denial of responsibility involves a refusal to accept one’s role in a criminal act. This technique can involve blaming outside forces such as negligent parents, delinquent peers, or neighbourhood factors (Sykes & Matza, 1957; Sacco & Kennedy, 2002; Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2010; McShane & Emeka, 2011). Denial of responsibility can also involve stated feelings of powerlessness which lead the individual to feel compelled to commit a crime (Sykes & Matza, 1957; Williams & McShane, 2010). On a less serious scale, sometimes individuals will claim their actions were merely accidental (Siegel, 2013). Examples of this type of justification include: “I didn’t mean it;” “it wasn’t my fault;” “they made me do it;” “I didn’t have a choice;” and “it’s either them or me” (Williams & McShane, 2010, p. 154; Siegel, 2013, p. 242; Lilly et al., 2007, p. 93).

Denial of Injury

Denial of injury involves the argument that no real harm was caused by a crime, despite the violation of a law (Sykes & Matza, 1957; Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2010; Sacco & Kennedy, 2002). Alternatively, it may involve the acknowledgment of minor harm or damage, but consist of minimizing the harm suffered (McShane & Emeka, 2011). Examples of this include: “The victim can easily afford the damage or loss;” “they’ve got so much, they’ll never miss it;” “they have insurance;” “they have too much money;” “everybody does it;” or “I didn’t really hurt anybody” (Williams & McShane, 2010, p. 154; Siegel, 2013, p. 242; Turgeman-Goldschmidt, 2009, p. 318; Lilly et al., 2007, p. 93). A key aspect of this neutralization is that it may also be supported by adults in the delinquent’s life. Parents, teachers, friends, and coworkers may support the denial of injury, diminishing the individual’s responsibility even further. This corroboration fuels the offender’s assertion that their actions are socially acceptable (Siegel, 2013).

Denial of the Victim

Denial of the victim is a justification that involves an argument that there was no true victim in a crime. This technique may involve believing that an individual is deserving of victimization, retaliation for actual or supposed prior behaviour, as well as viewing the victim as the ‘bad guy’ and themselves as the hero, righting wrongs (Sykes & Matza, 1957; Williams & McShane, 2010; Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2010; McShane & Emeka, 2011; Turgeman-Goldschmidt, 2009). Denying the victim often includes victim
blaming, with targets being identified as acceptable and unacceptable victims. Such blaming often results in a distancing of oneself from the target, and it is often easier to commit crimes against individuals who are dissimilar to an offender. For example, “when attacking homosexuals or minority groups, the delinquents feel that their victims got what they deserved” (Turgeman-Goldschmidt, 2009, p. 318). Context-driven explanations are also common (in this situation, the acts were not wrong) (Sykes & Matza, 1957). If a victim is not present, barely known, or unknown to the offender, it is even easier to deny their role as a victim (Sykes & Matza, 1957; Siegel, 2013). Examples of denial of the victim include: “They had it coming;” “they had a bad attitude;” and “they talked back” (Siegel, 2013, p. 242; Williams & McShane, 2010, p. 154).

**Condemnation of the Condemners**

Condemnation of condemners is a technique that involves an attack against those who disapprove of a crime. Delinquents argue that these individuals are hypocrites, corrupt, deviant, acting out of spite, or should not be allowed to pass judgment (Sykes & Matza, 1957; Williams & McShane, 2010; Lilly et al., 2007; Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2010). These condemners may include authority figures such as police officers, judges, parents, teachers, principals, or politicians. Offenders are able to shift the blame onto the condemners, cementing their belief that their actions are socially acceptable (Sykes & Matza, 1957; Siegel, 2013). Examples of this include: “If I didn’t do it to them, they’ll do it to me;” “everyone steals- why pick on me?;” and “the system is corrupt” (Siegel, 2013, p. 242; Turgeman-Goldschmidt, 2009, p. 318).

**Appeal to Higher Loyalties**

When appealing to higher loyalties, individuals argue that the demands of an important group supersede those of wider society (Sykes & Matza, 1957; Williams & McShane, 2010; Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2010; Siegel, 2013). This often relates to familial, workplace, or peer obligations, and these demands are generally seen as being more pressing (Sacco & Kennedy, 2002; Williams & McShane, 2010; Siegel, 2013). Examples of this technique include: “I did it for my friends;” “I didn’t do it for myself;” “they are strangers;” “I have to protect my friends;” and “only cowards run away” (Turgeman-Goldschmidt, 2009, p. 318; Williams & McShane, 2010, p. 154; Siegel, 2013,
After employing one or more of these techniques, delinquents are led into a state of ‘drift,’ a condition which is discussed in more detail below.

### 3.1.2. Drift

The image of the delinquent I wish to convey is one of drift; an actor neither compelled nor committed to deeds nor freely choosing them; neither different in any simple or fundamental sense from the law abiding, nor the same; conforming to certain traditions in American life while partially unreceptive to other more conventional traditions; and finally, an actor whose motivational system may be explored along lines explicitly commended by classical criminology - his peculiar relation to legal institutions. (Matza, 1964, p. 28)

Following the use of one or more techniques of neutralization, delinquents are in “a state of limbo or drift that [makes] deviant acts permissible” (Williams & McShane, 2010, p. 153). After entering this state, individuals have the choice either to commit such an act or return to a place of conformity. Drift revolves around two conditions: preparation and desperation. Preparation involves the discovery that an act can be perpetrated, knowledge that the individual can carry out the act, and minimization of the negative consequences associated with the act, such as fear or risk of capture. Desperation requires extreme stress, feelings of powerlessness, and/or the need to assert oneself. When both of these are present, an individual can commit a deviant act (Matza, 1964; Williams & McShane, 2010; Lilly et al., 2007). Drift allows individuals to embrace conventional, subterranean, and sometimes even deviant norms, while having the ability to drift in and out of both delinquency and law-abiding society when it suits them (Akers & Sellers, 2009). Individuals are more likely to drift when they have few social ties and responsibilities, which is partly why adolescence is the period most often tied to this theory (Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2010).

Drift relates most commonly to time periods where conventional social controls are absent, weakened, or ineffective. Such periods are generally linked to adolescence, when many familial control mechanisms become less important and peer values overshadow all others. Adolescents are often under minimal supervision and have few responsibilities, which leaves them with much free, unsupervised time to get into trouble.
This fits the well-known age-crime curve,\textsuperscript{10} as criminal activity tends to peak in adolescence and drop off following adulthood (Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2009; Loeber, 2012).

3.1.3. \textit{Learning or Control Theory?: Where Does Neutralization Theory Fit?}

Neutralization theory began as a learning theory (Cullen & Agnew, 2011; Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2010), but is now often considered a control theory (Williams & McShane, 2010).\textsuperscript{11} There is certainly some overlap between the two, and the theory could fall into several categories. Sykes and Matza (1957), inspired by Sutherland’s theory of differential association (Akers & Sellers, 2009), argue that techniques of neutralization are learned; it is thus unsurprising that they initially deemed it to be a learning theory. Sykes and Matza believed that techniques of neutralization were learned and accepted through differential reinforcement and imitation (Akers & Sellers, 2009). Nevertheless, “in a fundamental way … their perspective is a control theory” (Cullen & Agnew, 2011, p. 207). “In short, techniques of neutralization are the mechanisms that people use to escape society’s controls and feel free to engage in crime” (Cullen & Agnew, 2011, p. 207). Drift’s focus on adolescence links heavily to control aspects, as this is when social controls are weaker and peer pressure is strong (Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2010).

3.1.4. \textit{Strengths and Limitations of Neutralization Theory}

One of the great strengths of Sykes and Matza’s (1957) theoretical outlook is the scope of the theory. Attention is paid to criminal activity committed by all classes and the theory can be extended to many non-criminal activities, including designations of

\textsuperscript{10} The age crime curve relates to the fact that “the prevalence of offending in populations increases from late childhood, peaks during mid to late adolescence, and then decreases in adulthood” (Loeber, 2012, p. 11). This curve is found in all Western populations, and is present in males, females, and different cultures and ethnicities, although the shape of the curve may differ slightly in different populations (Loeber, 2012).

\textsuperscript{11} Unlike many theorists who attempt to explain crime by presuming that people are naturally law abiding, control theorists question why people conform to laws and societal norms (Akers & Sellers, 2009; Lilly et al., 2002). Control theory “suggests that crime and delinquency are going to occur unless people conform to all of the social demands placed on them” (Lilly et al., 2007, p. 71).
deviance. This great scope is important because other theories of the day focused explicitly on lower class or subcultural criminality. Additionally, Sykes and Matza’s (1957) techniques of neutralization and Matza’s (1964) theory of drift can be used to explain some aspects of both personal and property offences.

There is some concern, however, about the temporal order of neutralization techniques. While Sykes and Matza (1957) argue that these justifications precede criminal activity, others argue that this is difficult to prove (Sacco & Kennedy, 2002). Additionally, some argue that these techniques may be employed after the fact when individuals are either caught or feel associated guilt (Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2010). Piquero, Tibbetts, and Blankenship (2005) explain that neutralizations precede a criminal act, while similar justifications following an act are actually rationalizations. Others stress that neutralizations may, in fact, occur after a deviant act (Morris, 2011). Supporters of the theory argue that this is not a serious problem, “because individuals may be predisposed to make up such rationalizations for their behavior regardless of whether they do it before or after the act of offending (Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2010, p. 450). This is often linked back to individuals with low self-control, lending more support to this theory falling into the control group of theories.

Sykes and Matza have also been criticized for limiting the number of potential neutralization techniques. While they name five techniques, others argue that “there may be endless excuses people make up to rationalize behaviors they know are wrong” (Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2010, p. 449). Further, opponents have also argued that some of these techniques are difficult, if not impossible, to measure (Tibbetts & Hemmens, 2010). We turn next to some tests of neutralization theory.

3.1.5. **Tests of Neutralization Theory**

Ball (1966) performed one of the first empirical tests of neutralization theory. Four offence scenarios, including both personal and property examples, were presented to participants (male high school students and institutionalized male delinquents). Each scenario also included neutralization options. The institutionalized group scored significantly higher on the neutralization inventory, as did high school students with juvenile court records, and males with higher levels of self-reported delinquency. These
findings were present for both personal and property offences. Ball argued that these findings supported Sykes and Matza’s assertion that delinquents are more likely than nondelinquents to accept neutralization techniques. He did not, however, believe that the findings supported neutralizations as being the only factor contributing to delinquency. Rather, Ball believed findings to be more supportive of such techniques increasing the risk of delinquency in conjunction with other related factors.

Agnew (1994) conducted a study using cross-sectional and longitudinal data from the National Youth Survey to examine techniques of neutralization related to violence. While a very small portion of the sample (under 1%) approved of violence, the majority of participants accepted at least one of the neutralizations justifying violence in specific situations (54%). Both longitudinal and cross-sectional data suggested that “acceptance of neutralizations has a positive effect on violence” (Agnew, 1994, p. 573). Agnew (1994) also found that neutralizations related to violence affected participants with delinquent peer groups and participants who did not approve of violence most strongly.

Along with studies of delinquency, “the adoption of neutralization techniques has also been used to explain the onset of white-collar crime” (Siegel, 2013, p. 243). Piquero et al. examined the use of such techniques in their 2005 study of corporate crime. MBA students were surveyed in a university classroom, and were presented a scenario related to corporate crime. Two out of the five techniques were found to be predictive of intentions to commit corporate crime: belief in the overwhelming importance of profit (appeal to higher loyalty), and belief that the government exaggerates consumer danger (denial of injury and/or denial of responsibility). They also found that participants over the age of 35 were influenced significantly more by the justifications than were younger participants, especially in terms of profit-based neutralizations. This study extends the reach of these techniques beyond juvenile delinquency, as “Sykes and Matza never claimed that such a model would not apply to other forms of offending” (Piquero et al., 2005, p. 182).

Finally, Worley and Worley (2013) examined neutralization techniques in correctional settings. They investigated whether inmates engaging in public autoerotism (masturbating in full view of female correctional employees as a form of harassment)
employed techniques of neutralization to justify their behaviours. Support for neutralization theory was found, with denial of injury being the most common excuse employed. Denial of the victim, condemnation of the condemners (prison employees), and denial of responsibility were also common. Appeal to higher loyalties was the least common technique found, with very few respondents citing this as a justification.

**Neutralization Theory, Hate Crimes, and Cybercrime**

Byers, Crider, and Biggers (1999; 2004) examined techniques of neutralization related to the commission of hate crimes (also known as ‘claping’) against the Amish. After conducting eight in-depth interviews with non-Amish US residents who had previously claped, they found that not all participants used neutralization techniques. Those who did not employ any techniques were less likely to feel guilt. All five techniques were present among participants, with denial of injury and denial of the victim being the forms most often used (reported by 31.5% and 23.7% of participants, respectively). When denying injury, participants argued that no real harm was done, as the acts were mischief and not particularly serious. Denial of the victim often led perpetrators to distance themselves from victims and the Amish community in general. Participants viewed themselves as superior to the Amish, and some argued that any abuse was deserved or justified. Victim denial included statements dehumanizing Amish victims and the Amish community. Appeal to higher loyalties (18.4%), condemnation of the condemners (15.8%), and denial of responsibility (10.5%) were also present in the sample, but their use was less common.

In their study of neutralization techniques and music piracy, Ingram and Hinduja (2008) surveyed 2,032 undergraduate Midwestern American university student about their illegal music downloading behaviours. A weak relationship between neutralization techniques and music piracy was uncovered, with greater acceptance of such techniques being related to higher rates of piracy. Acceptance of denial of the victim/injury (this category was combined due to definitional overlap in survey

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12 Derived from the derogatory term ‘clape’ or ‘clapes,’ “claping is a local term that can be used to describe harassment, intimidation, and vandalism against Amish” (Byers et al., 2004, pp. 118-119). Examples include using automobiles to force buggies off the road, throwing objects at buggies, shouting threats and obscenities, and destroying mailboxes (Byers et al., 2004).
questions), denial of responsibility, and appeals to higher loyalty led to increases in moderate participation (101-1000 illegal MP3 downloads in the past year) in piracy (increased odds of 30% for both denial of injury/denial of the victim, 29% for denial of responsibility, and 24% for appeal to higher loyalties). While all three techniques substantially increased the likelihood of moderate levels of online piracy, appeal to higher loyalty was the only technique also predictive of high levels of online participation (1000 or more illegal MP3 downloads in the past year) (50% increase). Interestingly, this technique also had the strongest support among students who disapproved of illegal downloads (just over 10% of the sample). The authors caution that, although the findings support the usefulness of neutralization theory as a framework for studying music piracy, it is possible that neutralization techniques may not be especially relevant to the majority of students sampled, as nearly 90% did not view this behaviour as deviant. In such situations there may be no need to employ neutralization techniques. Conversely, this may be an attempt at neutralization in itself, since illegally downloading music is against the law and has been for some time. Thus, it is likely that most students are aware of this fact and continue to download music illegally regardless.

Steinmetz and Tunnell (2013) also addressed neutralization techniques and digital piracy in their examination of posts on a piracy website’s discussion forum. The most commonly employed technique was denial of injury, with downloaders (aka pirates) asserting that no one is injured by their actions (generally citing the recording and film industries as the victim, arguing that their actions have little effect on these massive companies). Pirates also sometimes argued that illegal file distribution can sometimes help smaller films gain greater reach and popularity. When condemning the condemners, posters pointed to flaws in legislation and the entertainment industry as the reason for their actions. Appeals to higher loyalties were also apparent, including anti-copyright and anti-authoritarianism sentiments present throughout the pirate subculture. Pirates may feel a sense of solidarity when breaking copyright laws, as they are viewed as outdated and useless. When denying the victim, pirates employed two strategies. First, victims were transformed into deserving victims (as in the case of the industries responsible for producing content). Second, victims were denied altogether, due to intangibility and the lack of physical property. Finally, denial of responsibility was the least frequent technique discussed on the boards. The only discussion in this area
surrounded denial of responsibility in a legal context, with pirates discussing its utility as a legal defence. In such cases, pirates point to the weaknesses of wireless network protection, and argue that someone else must have downloaded the content. In this study, the use of this technique “is more legal strategy than neutralization” (Steinmetz & Tunnell, 2013, p. 61).

Neutralization theory has also been used in studies of online hacking. Turgeman-Goldschmidt (2009) interviewed 54 Israeli hackers to determine their use of neutralization techniques. While denial of responsibility did not emerge as a theme, denial of injury, denial of the victim, condemnation of condemners, and appeal to higher loyalties all emerged as commonly used techniques. When denying injury, hackers often argued that, while deviant, their behaviour is not harmful or produces very little harm. If harm was clear, interviewees were quick to claim that their intentions were not cruel. Turgeman-Goldschmidt (2009) posits that harm is often difficult to see in computer crimes due to their intangible nature. Denial of the victim was commonly reported, with hackers often viewing victims as deserving of any harm incurred. Hacking was undertaken as a form of revenge or punishment, with victims being considered the enemy. When condemning the condemners, participants argued that their accusers often committed deviant acts as well. They pointed to bureaucracy as the true enemy, and often viewed their activities as necessary given the high prices set by software companies. Victim blaming was also clear in the condemnation, as hackers felt that victims should take greater care to protect important documents if they want to keep them safe. Finally, appeals to higher loyalties included claims that hacking is often committed due to group loyalty or protection of friends or family. These relationships were perceived as more valuable than obeying the law. Freedom of information was viewed as a key value among hackers, and many interviewees felt that upholding this value was too important to ignore. Turgeman-Goldschmidt (2009) argues that denial of responsibility may be absent due to the technique’s focus on external factors. Hackers are unlikely to view themselves as passive victims being controlled by outside forces, and many are proud of their actions and willing to take responsibility for them.

Morris also addressed computer hacking and neutralization theory in a 2011 study of 785 US college students. Surveys concerning students’ computer activities were administered in ten courses at a university in the southeastern United States. Due
to overlap in definitions of each technique, neutralizing attitudes were examined as a single construct. When controlling for other predictors of deviant behaviour, hacking was still significantly tied to neutralizing attitudes. Association with other hackers was also significantly linked to reports of hacking. When examining individual hacking activities, Morris (2011) found that neutralizing attitudes significantly predicted illegal access and password guessing, but not manipulation of files.

3.1.6. **Neutralization Theory and the Current Study**

Because a large body of recent research has extended the gaze of neutralization theory beyond that of delinquency (Worley & Worley, 2013; Piquero et al., 2005), this theory is applicable to many forms of crime. “Neutralization theory can be used to explain the paradoxical behavio[u]rs of serious street-allied offenders as well as those of more conventionally attached criminals (and even nonoffenders)” (Topalli, 2005, p. 823). Certainly this theory lends itself well to childhood and adolescent bullying, as these activities fit within the timeframe that this theory originally addressed. I feel, however, that this theory is equally applicable to bullying perpetrated at the post-secondary level. Several studies have used this theory to explain adult criminal activities (Topalli, 2005; Piquero et al., 2005), which suggests that these techniques can be employed at various ages in relation to wide-ranging activities. The aforementioned cyber studies lend further support to this assertion.

Several of the techniques of neutralization could apply to online bullying of LGBTQ young adults. Denial of responsibility could come into effect to excuse online activities. Individuals may not accept that what they are doing is wrong, and may claim that the activities they engage in are not meant to be bullying. Denial of injury could also come into play, as bullies often do not directly experience the effects of their victimization. Condemnation of the condemners could be used to justify behaviour because online victimization is becoming all-too common, and many adults engage in this type of behaviour as well. Individuals may appeal to higher loyalties, arguing that they are acting on behalf of their friends or a larger peer network. They may also feel that engaging in online attacks is a form of bonding, and that if they do not participate they may be excluded or become victims themselves. Janoff (2005) argues that “queer bashers rationalize and downplay their violence” (p. 47) by attempting to conform to peer
group norms, often placing group affiliation on a pedestal. Finally, the technique that would likely apply best would be that of denial of the victim. Because this often results in a distancing of oneself from the victim, Sykes and Matza (1957) argue that this technique is often used when victimizing minority groups, particularly homosexuals. Turgeman-Goldschmidt (2009) echoes this sentiment. Additionally, because the Internet creates a separation and sense of anonymity, denial of the victim may be even easier. This is because online victims are not “present” in the same fashion as they are offline.\textsuperscript{13} Thus “the denial of a victim may be particularly apparent in cyber-related crimes” (Morris, 2011, p. 4). This is due to the invisibility of online victims, or not knowing them in an offline context (Morris, 2011).

Though theory plays a key role in research, it is important to also discuss the decisions made and methods followed throughout the research process. This leads to a discussion in the next chapter of research decisions and methods employed in the current study.

\textsuperscript{13} This can be tied to the concept of the absent victim as discussed by Sykes & Matza (1957).
4. Research Methods

4.1. Research Questions

Because very little research has been conducted on post-secondary students’ experiences with homophobic and transphobic cyberbullying, this study is exploratory and descriptive in nature (Dantzker & Hunter, 2012). The research questions reflect this exploratory focus. The primary research question is:

1. What are post-secondary students’ experiences with homophobia and transphobia in online environments?

I am also interested in discussing some specific aspects of the cyberbullying experience, so some sub-questions include:

2. What types of cybervictimization have been experienced and/or perpetrated?
3. Where have instances of online homophobia and transphobia been encountered?
4. Through which methods are post-secondary students victimized?

The thesis focuses on current and retrospective accounts of cybervictimization, so the first question is not limited to the post-secondary arena, but can include experiences in high schools, middle schools, and possibly elementary schools. Perpetration was included in the questions to allow for the consideration of bully-victims – those who victimize others as well as being victimized themselves - in the analysis if they were present.
4.2. Sample Selection

4.2.1. Sampling Methods

Purposive and Snowball Sampling

Purposive or criterion-based sampling is a form of sampling that involves selecting participants based on certain characteristics a researcher has decided are of interest (Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003). These sampling requirements are generally based on a detailed review of the literature as well as study-specific considerations (e.g. time, resources, access to participants, recruitment difficulties) (Dantzker & Hunter, 2012). Participants were sampled in this fashion because it was important that they met several criteria for inclusion. The requirements for participation include the following:

- Current registration at a post-secondary institution in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia
- Participants must be age 19 or older
- Participants must have witnessed or experienced homophobic or transphobic cyberbullying

The Lower Mainland refers to the city of Vancouver and its surrounding area (both the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) and the Fraser Valley Regional District (FVRD). Lower Mainland communities include regional districts in the Upper, Lower, and Central Fraser Valley as well as the Metro Vancouver area.14

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14 Upper Fraser Valley communities include Agassiz, Bridal Falls, Chehalis, Chilliwack, Cultus Lake, Harrison Hot Springs, Hope, Rosedale, Ruby Creek, Sardis, and Yarrow, among others.

Central Fraser Valley communities include Abbotsford, Aldergrove, Mission, Mount Lehman, and Sumas, among others.

Lower Fraser Valley/Metro Vancouver communities include Anmore, Belcarra, Boundary Bay, Bridgeport, Brighouse, Burnaby, Coquitlam, Crescent Beach, Delta, Fort Langley, Haney, Langley, Maillardville, Maple Ridge, New Westminster, Newton, North Vancouver, Pitt Meadows, Port Coquitlam, Port Moody, Queensborough, Richmond, Sapperton, Scottsdale, Steveston, Surrey, Tsawassen, Vancouver, West Vancouver, Whalley, and White Rock, among others.
Reasons for including the post-secondary student aspect were two-fold. First, very little cyberbullying research has been conducted in the post-secondary arena (Wensley & Campbell, 2012; Schenk & Fremouw, 2012; Finn, 2004; Lindsay & Krysik, 2012). This seemed odd, as much secondary school research indicates cyberbullying is fairly common among high school students (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Hoff & Mitchell, 2009), who are close in both age and experience to many first and second year college and university students (Lindsay & Krysik, 2012; Schenk & Fremouw, 2012; Adams & Lawrence, 2011). Additionally, researchers acknowledge that cyberbullying and harassment extend into adulthood (Lindsay & Krysik, 2012; Finn 2004), particularly in studies examining workplace cybervictimization (Privitera & Campbell, 2009; McMullen, 2011). The second reason relates to concerns about younger populations (under the age of 19) and informed consent, as students may be reluctant to participate if it meant they needed parental or guardian permission, particularly if they were not out to these individuals. This concern has been raised as a weakness in past research with LGBTQ youth (Haskell, 2008; Varjas, Mahan, Birkbichler, Lopp & Dew, 2007), with some studies going as far as seeking consent waivers for underage participants (Hillier et al., 2012; DeLonga et al., 2011). It was important that the decision to share their stories was theirs alone and not to be unduly influenced by a family member. Participants were thus asked to participate only if they were 19 years of age or older, although Simon Fraser University’s Office of Research Ethics allows for the inclusion of participants under the age of 19 if they are registered SFU students (they are considered adults).

The next requirement was that participants must have experienced homophobic or transphobic cyberbullying in some form. Experiences with cyberbullying could be personal or vicarious (in such cases, interviewees could recount the experiences of friends or acquaintances, or examples of witnessed cyberbullying). Although homophobia and transphobia are often experienced by members of the LGBTQ community (Taylor et al., 2011; Fone, 2000), heterosexual individuals are also sometimes exposed to homophobic and/or transphobic bullying (Haskell, 2008; Cotten-Huston & Waite, 1999). This often occurs because of a perceived sexual orientation or gender identity, but such behaviour may alternatively be intended to demean or emasculate an openly heterosexual individual. Homophobia and transphobia may also be experienced by allied peers due to their beliefs and association with LGBTQ
individuals (Blackburn, 2012). Such a possibility led me to extend the criteria to include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and heterosexual post-secondary students as possible research participants.

Although the sampling strategy was predominantly purposive, additional sampling was through a snowball method. Also known as chain, network, chain referral, multiplicity, or respondent-driven sampling (Ritchie et al., 2003; Palys & Atchison, 2014), the snowball method involves starting with one or several participants or contacts and relying on them to help broaden the sample. The individuals chosen to aid with recruitment are often knowledgeable about the research area or well-connected in the community of interest, and recruit others who they know to fit the sample requirements (Dantzker & Hunter, 2012; Palys & Atchison, 2014; Ritchie et al., 2003). Snowball sampling is often used in research with hard-to-contact populations and studies that address sensitive topics (Ritchie et al, 2003; Dantzker & Hunter, 2012; Palys & Atchison, 2014). Both of these criteria apply in the current study, as information about an individual’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity may not be readily apparent (Janoff, 2005). Members of the LGBTQ community, however, may know others who meet study requirements but may not be aware of the research being conducted. Additionally, discussing homophobia, transphobia, and bullying may not be immediately appealing to potential participants. Having a trusted individual endorse the research and the researcher can make participation more appealing, and may encourage others to share their experiences.

Many participants and outside parties (graduate students, faculty members, friends) contacted me to ask if I needed help in recruiting additional participants. These individuals took my research posters and got the information to people who may not have otherwise seen it (e.g. extending the study information to local pride organizations, posting it on social networking and queer-specific websites, sending the information to friends who may be willing to participate). This was an additional way to get the word out about my study, and I welcomed the help and further reach provided by these supportive individuals.
4.3. Recruitment

4.3.1. Recruitment Posters

Recruitment was carried out primarily through informational posters (see Appendix C: Recruitment Poster). Posters contained relevant recruitment and study details, as well as contact information which included my name and a non-SFU email address. Posters were put up in general areas of several local university and college campuses, including all four SFU campuses: Burnaby, Surrey, Harbour Centre (Vancouver), and Goldcorp Centre for the Arts (Vancouver). Other institutions included Douglas College (Coquitlam and New Westminster campuses), Langara College, and the University of British Columbia. Posters were placed on several office doors in the School of Criminology at SFU. Posters were also put up in several inclusive spaces in the Lower Mainland, both on post-secondary campuses and in the community. SFU’s Out on Campus (campus LGBTQ centre) and the SFU Women’s Centre displayed posters both inside their centres and on exterior windows (both centres are at SFU’s Burnaby campus). Qmunity (a queer resource centre in downtown Vancouver) put up posters in their waiting area.

4.3.2. Recruitment Woes: Branching Out and Considering New Strategies

Initial interest in the study was quite promising, with several potential participants contacting me within the first week of putting up posters. This led to several interviews being completed within a single week. Unfortunately, this short, intensive, and encouraging period of interest was followed by a much longer, oftentimes discouraging period of few responses. I continued to re-post my recruitment posters, and hoped for the best, but very few emails filtered in after the first three interviews. An interviewee who participated in the pilot study for this research also agreed to be included in this study, bringing the total number of participants to four. Following a semester of recruitment difficulties, I chose to engage in some creative strategies for the next round of recruitment. Many were Internet-based (fitting, given the topic), and these strategies produced two additional interviewees (bringing the total to six participants).
Classified ads were placed on several local free online classified sites. These included: Craigslist, Kijiji, OLX, and BC SuperAds. All ad text was identical to that of the recruitment posters, and ads were posted on April 30, 2013. Paid classified ads were placed in both online and newspaper publications. Online ads were placed with the Coquitlam Now (May 5-11, 2013) and the Georgia Straight (May 9-15, 2013). A newspaper classified ad was also placed with the Georgia Straight (May 9-15, 2013). Ad text was identical to that on the recruitment posters, but the spacing was adjusted for the newspaper advertisement.

Although I do not have a Facebook account myself, several people offered to aid in recruitment by posting my study information on their Facebook walls and/or timelines. The posts went up between February and May 2013. Facebook helpers included my senior supervisor, a professor in the Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies, five Criminology graduate students, and several undergraduate students (including some previous interview participants). Some of these posts also led to other Facebook friends posting the information on their walls and timelines.

After contacting Out on Campus to inquire about putting up recruitment posters in their centre, they also offered to put out a call for participants in their email newsletter. The newsletter includes a variety of information, such as volunteer opportunities, upcoming events and workshops, community groups, job offerings, and research opportunities. The first call for participants appeared in the January 31, 2013 newsletter, and a follow-up was placed in the May 7, 2013 edition. In the January newsletter mine was the only research post, and in the May newsletter mine was one of five research posts.

On May 10, 2013, an email was sent out to all Criminology graduate students through the graduate secretary with my research poster attached. Students were encouraged to spread the word if they knew anyone who might be interested in participating. The poster was also sent to Dr. Burtch’s Spring 2013 Criminology 333 (Gender, Law, and the State) and 334 (Law and Human Reproduction) course email lists, and Dr. Fabian emailed the 2012/13 Criminology honours cohort as well as the incoming cohort for Fall 2013. Dr. Burtch also sent the research poster as an electronic attachment to several faculty and graduate students working with the Safety Nets for
Gender Variant Youth research group led by Dr. Ann Travers of SFU's Department of Sociology and Anthropology.

A call for research participants was sent to the undergraduate advisors of several departments at SFU in May 2013. I requested that the advisors send an email message with my study information (pulled directly from the recruitment poster) to declared major and minor students within their department. Advisors in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, the Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies, the School of Communication, the Department of English, the Department of Psychology, the Department of Archaeology, the School for International Studies, and the Department of History sent the call for participants to their declared undergraduate students. This wider casting of the net led to very little additional participant interest.

4.4. Sample

The final sample consists of six participants. Interviewees were both undergraduate and graduate students, and all studied at universities in the Lower Mainland. The majority of participants were Simon Fraser University students.

15 I decided against sending the email to the undergraduate list for my home department, the School of Criminology. I was concerned that students may feel obligation to participate if the recruitment email came from their major or minor department. I have been employed as a teaching assistant and tutor marker for several courses over the last two years, and I thought students might be influenced by seeing my name (either positively or negatively, depending on their opinion of me).
### Table 4-1  Final Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym*</th>
<th>Sexual Identity or Orientation**</th>
<th>Gender Identity**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clark Kent</td>
<td>Not identified***</td>
<td>Not identified***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercy</td>
<td>Straight, bi, or pansexual (situation dependent)</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeeves</td>
<td>Pansexual queer</td>
<td>Trans-masculine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>Not identified***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gia</td>
<td>Queer/lesbian/gay</td>
<td>Female/genderqueer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damon</td>
<td>Pansexual/polyamorous</td>
<td>Transmasculine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Selected by participants or assigned by researcher if selection declined; **Self-identified by participants; ***Section left blank by participant

All information in the above table, as well as further demographic information, was obtained through a follow-up questionnaire administered after each interview (see Appendix E: Interview Follow-Up Questionnaire). All questionnaire results were submitted in the participant’s own words, and are reported as written. In an effort to protect confidentiality and prevent identification of any interviewees, additional demographic information will not be reported for individual participants. Interviewees had varied racial and cultural backgrounds, including Caucasian, mixed race, and Native American participants. All participants were full-time students and most were also employed part-time or full-time. All participants volunteered or had plans to volunteer during their free time. Years since high school graduation ranged from four years (2009) to 18 years (1995); this range was consistent with level of education, as those who had been out of high school longer were enrolled in graduate level programs.

### 4.5. Interview Method

#### 4.5.1. In-depth, Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews were conducted between January and June 2013. The interview length ranged from 45 minutes to one hour and 50 minutes, as recommended length is generally between one and two hours in length (Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2003; Scott & Garner, 2013). Participants were given the opportunity to select a location for the
interview (Legard et al., 2003), and both on and off-campus locations were offered if interviewees did not express a preferred location. The majority of interviews were conducted in on-campus locales, either in library study rooms booked for several hours or in fairly quiet, public areas (e.g. coffee shops, restaurants). Interviews were recorded on a digital device (with permission), and field notes were taken to supplement the recordings.

Semi-structured interviews generally follow an interview guide or schedule (see Appendix D: Interview Guide). Interview guide questions are determined based on the research questions, past research findings, and related literature. While questions in the guide are predetermined, semi-structured interview format may differ depending on the participant (Dantzker & Hunter, 2012; Scott & Garner, 2013). The interview guide provides structure and a framework, ensuring that similar questions are posed in different interviews. The guide, however, also allows for flexibility when needed (Scott & Garner, 2013; Legard et al., 2003).

In-depth, qualitative interviews allow for a variety of question styles, including both closed and open-ended options (Dantzker & Hunter, 2012). As recommended by Palys and Atchison (2014), the majority of questions in this study were open-ended (as I was most interested in hearing a participant’s experiences expressed in their own words). A few closed-ended questions were also included to introduce topics. Once an answer was offered, these questions allowed the opportunity for further probing. Because the interviews were semi-structured, there was room to “go off script” and discuss some issues in further detail, as well as to address topics not originally considered. There is room to ask for clarification, additional information, and to follow-up on interesting points (Dantzker & Hunter, 2012).

4.5.2. Feminist Interview Style

Feminist approaches to interviewing differ somewhat from typical in-depth interviews. The focus in this style of interview is on minimizing the distance between interviewer and interviewee (Scott & Garner, 2013; Flavin, 2004; Legard et al., 2003). Researchers should be mindful of how they present themselves to participants and should consider language choices, interview location, and physical appearance/clothing.
Participants are considered to be experts in the interview topic and serve as informants to help the interviewer understand their thoughts and experiences (Flavin, 2004). Interviewers and interviewees collaborate in this method, both contributing to the end result of the research. Open-ended questions are encouraged, and given nuances and complexity of the topics being researched, it is important to maintain the voices of research participants in the final write-up and presentation of the data (Flavin, 2004; Palys & Atchison, 2014; Scott & Garner, 2013; Kong, Mahoney & Plummer, 2003). “Many gay men, lesbians, and bisexual and transgendered people will speak about their experiences only when they feel safe” (Kong et al., 2003, p. 103), so it was very important to me that participants felt safe and comfortable both during and after the interviews.

Reciprocity is also important (Flavin, 2004; Legard et al., 2003), although not necessarily in a traditionally-defined financial form.

While offering a participant money or gifts in exchange for their participation might seem like a reasonable way of expressing your appreciation for the time and energy that they contribute towards providing you with the information you need to find answers to your research questions, for some people such payment may be seen as insulting. (Palys & Atchison, 2014, p. 120)

Such offers can, in such cases, actually deter individuals from participating in a study. Further, it is difficult to determine what forms of material incentives will be the most appealing or carry the most value. Perceived value is often specific to the individual participating and, without a great deal of knowledge about them ahead of time, a lot of guesswork could be involved (Palys & Atchison, 2014). It was important to me that interviewees participate because they wanted to and because they felt like sharing their experiences, and I was concerned that offering a material incentives might have a negative effect on participation. In addition, as suggested by Scott and Garner (2013), there was concern that it may lead some individuals to lie or exaggerate to qualify for the study, and that it may deter individuals who did meet the requirements but do not respond to extrinsic rewards. As recommended by Palys and Atchison (2014), my hope was to appeal to participants in a more intrinsic fashion. I stressed the fact that interviewees would be given the opportunity to share their experiences (both positive
and negative, to demonstrate that participants are resilient and not merely victims) (Haskell & Burtch, 2010), and that their words would be used to try to achieve a clearer understanding of homophobia and transphobia on the Internet (see Appendix C: Recruitment Poster).

4.5.3. Additional Forms of Interview Data

The ideal was to record all interviews, but I was prepared in the event that participants were unwilling to be digitally recorded (see, for example, Scott & Garner, 2013; Legard et al., 2003). The back-up plan involved taking detailed field notes, documenting answers to interview questions as well as reactions, pauses, facial expressions, and other relevant responses. Luckily this did not prove to be necessary, as it would have lengthened interviews considerably. Also, it is more likely that parts of answers, reactions to answers, and some other subtle aspects of the interview would have been missed (see Legard et al., 2003). I did however take brief field notes to supplement my recordings, as well as to ensure some data in the event of a recording malfunction. Notes included when the interview started and ended, interview location, notes about specific questions or answers, notes about reactions and pauses, and general comments.

A follow-up questionnaire was given to participants after each interview (see Appendix E: Follow-Up Questionnaire). The questionnaire contained demographic questions, as well as clarification questions to flesh out interview findings. Interviewees were instructed that they could skip any questions that made them feel uncomfortable or for which they did not have answers. Interviewees were also given space on the back of the questionnaire to expand on any of their answers or to discuss anything that was not covered in the interview. To allow participants to express themselves and inject their own voices into the research as much as possible, participants were given the opportunity to select their own pseudonyms. Pseudonyms are “invented names that are used consistently through your notes” (Palys & Atchison, 2014, pp. 75-76), and are used to replace names of participants and to maintain confidentiality. Participants were also encouraged to define their own sexual orientation and/or gender identity, rather than me presuming or assigning one to them. Participants were asked how they would like to be
referred to in the study (e.g. in masculine, feminine, or neutral terms) to allow them to have additional ownership over their representation.

### 4.6. Ethical Considerations

#### 4.6.1. Risk Designation and Informed Consent

This study was designated minimal risk by the SFU Office of Research Ethics. Approval was obtained January 4, 2013. All interviews were recorded on a digital recording device, and participants were given the opportunity to opt-out of the recorded interview. Participants were informed that they could withdraw their consent at any time during the interview, and that the interview would end at this time. They were also assured that they could pause at any point, and could refuse to answer questions or decide to return to questions at a later time.

As soon as participants contacted me via email, I discussed the details of the study with them. If they were still interested in participating, I emailed them copies of the SFU Office of Research Ethics (ORE) approval as well as the informed consent form (see Appendix A: Participant Informed Consent Form). I wanted them to be able to ask questions prior to the interview or at the beginning of the interview rather than spending a great deal of time going through the consent form in person. These documents were sent to participants 24-48 hours prior to a scheduled interview through email. Upon first meeting in person, the consent process was discussed in more detail, and participants were given the opportunity to ask questions and voice concerns. Participants were informed that all interviews would be anonymized during transcription, and that this would involve the removal of all identifying information, names, and locations. Pseudonyms would be inserted where relevant, while all other potentially identifiable information would be blacked out. Interviewees were also assured that confidentiality would be guaranteed to the extent that it is permitted by law.

All copies of transcripts and recordings will be stored carefully until destruction, and participants were made aware of this as well. Digital MP3 recordings of interviews are stored on a password-protected memory stick in a locked filing cabinet. These recordings will be destroyed on August 31, 2015, and no digital copies will be
maintained. On this date, the interviews will be recorded over with ambient noise twice to ensure their destruction. Transcripts will also be stored in a separate locked filing cabinet until this date. No electronic copies of transcripts will be maintained, and all physical copies will be shredded on August 31, 2015.

4.6.2. *Counselling Contacts*

Although this project was designated minimal risk, the subject matter of this study can be a difficult one to talk about. Bullying, homophobia, and transphobia are difficult topics, and interviews may involve the recounting of painful memories, experiences, and emotions. I brought a list of local counselling contacts to each interview in case this proved to be an issue (see Appendix F: *Lower Mainland Counselling Contacts*). This approach is recommended when conducting interviews about sensitive topics (Legard et al., 2003). Participants were informed of this list in the consent form and through email exchange; however, they were not necessary in any of my interviews. Participants discussed their experiences openly, and allowed further probing without pushing back or refusing questions. There was no appearance of distress or extreme emotionality among any of my interviewees, and none of them requested the available information.

While emotional responses could be a factor for interviewees, as they are discussing their own experiences and those of people close to them, there is also the risk that hearing about these experiences could affect me as the researcher. This is often referred to as vicarious trauma, secondary trauma, or compassion fatigue (Goldenberg, 2002; Perron & Hiltz, 2006; Pickett, Brennan, Greenberg, Licht & Worrell, 1994). Post-interview effects are more likely to be experienced when research is conducted in topics addressing trauma and serious harm (Urquiza, Wyatt & Goodline-Jones, 1997; Rowling, 1999). I kept a detailed research journal throughout the entire process, and documented these feelings as they came up. I used this journal to debrief following each interview, and was careful to note anything that concerned or affected me. This allowed me to remove myself from some of the more painful discussions and view the study from a somewhat independent position.
4.7. Analysis

4.7.1. Transcription

As recommended by Scott and Garner (2013), interviews were transcribed as soon as possible following the interviews. It was important that the conversations be fresh during transcription to eliminate any confusion and avoid any forgetfulness. This allowed me to easily recall words that were unclear in the recording, and remember facial expressions and noises that accompanied pauses or moments of hesitation. Transcripts were anonymized immediately to avoid any potential breach of confidentiality (Palys & Atchison, 2014). Potentially identifying information was blocked out while maintaining the information surrounding it. During transcription, interviews were listened to three times. First, I transcribed the interviews immediately following the session, and did so verbatim. The transcripts were then supplemented with observations from interview field notes. The second round of listening was performed to ensure accuracy of transcription. This occurred several weeks later, and allowed me to fill in any blanks and update any errors. Finally, transcripts and interviews were compared a third time following analysis to eliminate extraneous words and distractors (e.g. “um,” “uh,” and “like”) that did not relate explicitly to the answers being offered by participants. I was careful to leave in any of these words that appeared to be deliberate or related to a pause or moment of hesitation. Words were only eliminated if they seemed to be part of an interviewee’s normal speech pattern, and appeared to be used unintentionally. The motivation behind this relates to clarity of answers. It was important to ensure that participants’ views were presented and made clear, and sometimes the presence of these extra words can be distracting to the reader. Eliminating a small number of these allowed for a compromise: I was able to honour their voices while also presenting the data in the clearest way possible.

4.7.2. Coding: A Grounded Theory Approach

I did not come into this study with a predetermined theory in mind to guide the research, preferring instead to let the results lead to the choice of the most relevant theory. Rather than selecting a theory ahead of time, those who support the use of a grounded theory method “believe that theory should emerge from the empirical research
rather than guiding it from the start” (Scott & Garner, 2013, p. 93). Grounded theory was a good fit for my research agenda, since it was crucial to me that participants’ voices were heard. Another concern was to avoid inserting any outside influences or opinions if possible. Beginning a study with a selected theory could be dangerous, as it would frame all resulting data, themes, and observations.

Open coding is the first step in the coding process. In this stage, transcripts and field notes are examined carefully to allow early interpretations and themes to emerge (Strauss, 1987). Open coding permits researchers to become familiar with their data, while also allowing for the development of tentative themes based on commonly occurring ideas or experiences. Themes are often wide-ranging and abstract, but will be clarified or altered at later stages of analysis (Scott & Garner, 2013). These codes may remain, change, or be abandoned, depending on the analysis of other transcripts and the data as a whole (Strauss, 1987; Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Also known as relational coding (Scott & Garner, 2013), axial coding shifts the focus to more specific categories and key themes present throughout the sample (Strauss, 1987). Common themes are examined, looking at relationships and connections between themes and participants (Scott & Garner, 2013; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). “What were initially general insights, vague ideas, and hunches, are refined, expanded, discarded, or fully developed during this process” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 151). Categories with a great deal of support are solidified, while those that do not develop as initially expected are abandoned.

Following transcription, all interviews were uploaded to NVivo 10 qualitative analysis software for coding. Each transcript was examined separately, and any potential themes were identified. Nodes were created in the program for all possible themes, and new nodes were created while others were collapsed under other themes, re-developed, or abandoned as the analysis progressed. This led to a large number of initial, tentative themes, which were whittled down to a smaller list of the most prevalent themes. Nodes were eliminated if they were not as common as initially assumed, or if they were only present in a single transcript. The analysis involved going through each transcript several times in differing order to ensure that all transcripts and nodes were paid appropriate attention and to avoid missing anything. The final themes reflect the
research questions and the nodes present throughout several interviews and/or the entire sample.

4.7.3. **Reflexivity**

Reflexivity involves “identifying the assumptions underlying the research endeavor” (Flavin, 2004, p. 81) and “refers to the researcher’s ability to self-consciously refer to himself or herself in relation to the production of knowledge about research topics” (Roulston, 2010, p. 116). Being reflexive means identifying, acknowledging, and responding to preconceived notions and biases, including those that are held prior to the research and those that emerge during the research process. It is also important to make note of reactions to literature, research findings, and themes as well as limitations and difficulties. While it may seem that reflexivity draws attention to the subjective nature of qualitative research, it can actually strengthen research by allowing for transparency and examination of some of these issues. No form of research is entirely objective, so it is important to acknowledge some of these components rather than trying to hide or mask them (Flavin, 2004). Reflexive researchers should consider their background experiences (religion, education, career, peers, family), gender, race, and socioeconomic status, as each of these facets may influence research topics and decisions, as well as choice of theories or frameworks to guide or explain findings (Scott & Garner, 2013; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998; Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

**Research Journal: A Roadmap to Research**

A detailed journal was kept throughout the entire research process. The journal helped me remain reflexive throughout the project. It served to record ideas, brainstorm, track changes and decisions in the research design, record thoughts and observations, track tentative codes and themes, and to debrief following each interview. Such notes are important to track all stages of the research, as it can be easy to forget choices made in earlier stages (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008; Bondi, 2009; Gerstl-Pepin & Patrizio, 2009). It was important to be as honest as possible about my thoughts and decisions, and this was an excellent reflexive outlet (as recommended by Scott & Garner, 2013). It was an easy way to track my research decisions and progress, and this aided in the final write-up of the methods and analysis sections. The journal served as
an excellent resource to refer back to if I was unclear on any aspect of the study, and it provided a clear roadmap of the entire research process. The following is a journal excerpt from February 22, 2013, immediately after my third interview:

February 22, 2013

1:00 pm

Interview #3 complete- aim to transcribe tonight or tomorrow (done by tomorrow evening)

Some really cool discussion today- consider adding questions about:

1) reporting practices following cyberbullying incidents and

2) cyberbullying perpetrated by other members of the LGBTQ community (both of these came up quite a bit in the interview, and it would be interesting to see whether future participants have also experienced these aspects)

The topic of site-based discrimination came up again (this was also the case in interview #1)- look into some sources for this (Facebook’s policy, etc). This seems to be a serious problem for trans users, as most sites do not have many identity options.

4.7.4. Credibility and Authenticity

While validity and reliability are terms often used to identify “good” quantitative research, some argue that these terms are not applicable to the evaluation of qualitative research. These concepts were established in the natural sciences, and “because of this, and the very different epistemological basis of qualitative research, there are real concerns about whether the same concepts have any value in determining the quality or sustainability of qualitative evidence” (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003). Though some researchers feel more comfortable using these existing terms to evaluate qualitative research, others argue that terms such as ‘confirmability,’ ‘trustworthiness,’ ‘dependability,’ ‘credibility,’ ‘applicability,’ ‘transferability,’ ‘neutrality,’ and ‘consistency’ are more fitting (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003; Silverman & Marvasti, 2008; Golafshani, 2003). Whatever the preferred terms, it is important to conduct qualitative research that is
authentic and credible, and in the context of this study it was especially important to honour participants’ voices.

One way of exhibiting trustworthiness is through detailed documentation. This includes detailed description of research methods employed, as well as in-depth accounts of the research findings (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003; Scott & Garner, 2013). Detailed notes were kept throughout the entire research process (e.g. field notes, research journal), and notes were supplemented with triple-verified, verbatim transcripts. These notes and transcripts were also compared with follow-up questionnaires to ensure that all information was included in the final analysis. This led to greater confidence in the representation of interviewees, as the additional sources of information allowed for examination of the bigger picture. Follow-up questionnaires could be compared with quotes directly from the interviews and could potentially provide clarification if inconsistencies emerged. Clarification could also be sought through field notes and research journal excerpts.

It is also important to allow for as little inference as possible when reproducing participants’ accounts (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). Verbatim quotes are preferable to research notes or paraphrases, and care was taken to transcribe all aspects of the interview (questions, answers, pauses, facial expressions, and body language). Nothing should be considered trivial (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). Transcripts were compared to audio recordings multiple times, and distractors were only eliminated if they were deemed to be extraneous. To increase confidence in results, qualitative researchers should not only include discrete quotes from participants that support themes. Rather, examples should include questions preceding participants’ answers, as well as any additions or probes (e.g. “oh,” “yes,” “uh huh”) from the researcher that may encourage participants to elaborate or continue talking (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). Including this additional information not only provides context, but it allows the reader to view the larger picture of the interview. It also provides, in textual form, a small glance into the relationship and interactions between interviewee and interviewer. This is something I was very aware of when presenting my interview data.

In the next section, these study results are presented, and a discussion of their links to theory and the broader literature is provided.
5. Study Results and Discussion: Participants’ Experiences with Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying in Online Environments

Following a detailed qualitative analysis of all potential themes, several particularly prevalent themes emerged. Themes below include those directly related to the research questions, as well as any key themes that emerged from the data itself. This section begins with an examination of participants’ Internet use, including venues often visited. This is followed by a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of online socialization, and an examination of positive online experiences. Online victimization is addressed next, including opinions about definitions, and a discussion of where bullying is encountered and in what forms it has been experienced. Responses to cyberbullying are touched upon next, and the chapter closes with an examination of neutralization theory and the cyberbullying examples provided by interviewees.

5.1. Internet Use

Since being a post-secondary student was a study requirement, it is unsurprising that participants tend to use computers and the Internet quite frequently. Daily use estimates fall around five or six hours daily, although one participant (Damon) reports being online “like all the time. All through the day.” Throughout the day usage is common throughout the sample, with interviewees often checking in on different sites multiple times daily.

While some participants report multitasking when online, others tend to focus on one online activity at a time. The entire sample, however, uses the Internet for many different activities. School-based activities and research are often performed online or included online components (this is especially true for distance education students). Some participants use the Internet to supplement or carry out their work or volunteer
activities. This is particularly true of Mercy, who works as head of in-game staff for an online gaming company.

Most participants use the Internet more since leaving high school. This generally relates to increased ease of access, as several interviewees previously experienced access restrictions at home or at school. Increased use is often linked to owning a personal computer/laptop and being able to access the Internet privately at any time. Several participants also point to advances in technology since high school, and discuss using the Internet more frequently now that it is quicker and easier to use, as well as more accessible in public places. There is, however, one participant who discussed using the Internet less frequently since high school. Clark Kent used the Internet very often in high school due to being somewhat restricted in terms of leaving the house (due to age and parental expectations). Decrease in use was attributed to new experiences and fewer restrictions, although Clark still reports using the Internet quite frequently.

Clark: I still spend quite a bit of time, but it’s been dropped down, since I’m, I’m not stuck in my house.

5.1.1. Venues Visited

Interviewees visit many different online locations. Several participants use the Internet to access news sites and to perform research for school. The two gamers in my sample (Mercy and Fox) use the Internet to access games. Mercy plays and works in online games of the multiplayer role-playing variety. Fox accesses the Internet through XBox, often playing Call of Duty (a popular first-person shooter game) with online friends and strangers through XBox Live. All participants use the Internet for some form of socialization, with popular social networking sites including Facebook, Twitter, and Omegel (an anonymous text and video chat site connecting users randomly with strangers). Several interviewees also use Skype (an online voice and video messaging service) to video chat with friends online, while others currently or had previously used chat rooms or instant messaging services. YouTube is also a popular site, and was used for video viewing and sharing. For example, Jeeves and his partner post relationship blogs on YouTube to increase people’s understanding of their relationship as well as to provide an example for others in a similar position. Dating and pick-up sites are also used by participants, and examples include Grindr (a location-based site
for gay, bisexual, and curious men), SCRUFF (a location-based site for gay males worldwide), GROWLR (a location-based gay bear social network) and OKCupid (a Vancouver dating site for straight, gay, and bisexual individuals).

Blog access is very common throughout the sample, with Tumblr (a general blog site) being the most commonly accessed blog site. This may be due to a perception of Tumblr as a very gay-friendly site, with the ability to program trigger warnings and the presence of a strong allied heterosexual community. Jeeves discussed the strong activist presence on Tumblr, and Fox describes the site as “the gayest site for social media I have ever seen.” She continues:

Fox: Everything is gay there. And if you’re not actually gay on Tumblr, then you know, those people tend to throw out incredibly supportive statements constantly. To like, to keep with the theme.

Other blogs accessed include Jezebel (a feminist blog geared towards women’s interests), xoJane (a blogsite written by women for women), and Feministing (a blog for young feminists).

5.2. Online Socialization

Although all participants socialize online in some form, many have mixed feelings about Internet socialization. While some interviewees fall more in one direction than the other, the majority feel that online socialization has both strengths and weaknesses.

Online socialization is perceived to be especially useful for socially awkward individuals who may have difficulty building ‘real-world’ relationships. Although few participants describe themselves in this fashion, several point to examples of friends who fit into this mould. Many participants are self-professed introverts, and enjoy the ability to interact with others on their own terms in their own time. The Internet allows them to take time to form responses, and does not require an instant reply. Online socialization also allows interviewees to step back from a situation if needed (this was often brought up when discussing situations that annoyed or angered participants). Individuals who prefer one-on-one or small group experiences can tailor their online
discussions accordingly, without having to deal with large in-person groups that may make them uncomfortable. Ease of socialization was also brought up, as sometimes it is preferable to turn on the computer and have a quick discussion rather than expending the effort to make in-person plans and meet up. Fox discussed often using this as a simple way to satisfy a need for socialization without having to be inconvenienced by schedules, public transportation, and physical locations (e.g. making reservations, finding a location that is accessible to everyone, finding a date/time that works).

Participants also point to the ability to communicate with long-distance friends and family members. This echoes findings in previous research (Kowalski et al., 2008; McQuade et al., 2009; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). Facebook, Skype, and email are often used to maintain such relationships. Several students in this sample are international students, and for them the Internet is key for staying in contact with home. This is also true of students from elsewhere in Canada. Online-only friendships were also discussed, with participants using the Internet as the sole means of communicating with others who they had met online. Such friendships are sometimes cultivated through other offline friends, but are also sometimes the result of meeting in an online setting and hitting it off. The development and maintenance of these friendships would be impossible without the Internet. Though several participants have online-only friends, many use the Internet to supplement their socialization activities with friends from their everyday lives. Participants often use the Internet to make plans to meet in person, or to keep up with people during busy times.

The most often cited disadvantage is an overreliance on online socialization. Participants mentioned that some people socialize online rather than interacting in person, which can serve to isolate them further.

**Gia:** I think some people use it as a way of, like, distancing themselves from people. You can sort of maintain those connections without actually seeing them in person. Which I guess is fine sometimes. I’m a pretty introverted person. But that doesn’t mean that there isn’t a huge need in my life for, like, person to person interaction, right? And I don’t think you can get that all through, like, Skyping, right?

**Aynsley:** Yeah.
Gia: Yeah, so I think there’s a definite need for balance. Like, there’s a Facebook event, and I’ll see you there. But the event isn’t Facebook.

This theme links back to several participants using online socialization to supplement in-person socialization, rather than using it as a replacement.

Another oft-mentioned disadvantage was the constant need for clarification and the possibility for misunderstanding online. Several interviewees brought up the role of facial cues and tone of voice as being pivotal in communication, yet both of these are typically absent in online communication. Sarcasm is often misread as being a literal interpretation, and disjointed written comments can come off as unintentionally offensive (especially if taken out of context). Further, online discussions can be difficult to follow, and some comments may get lost in the jumble of multiple posts or messages from several people.

Participants also point to an increased bravery online, where individuals say things they would not say to another person face-to-face. Several interviewees discussed issues in empathizing with others online when only seeing a screen name. While understanding that an online identity is connected to a real person may not be as problematic if one knows the person in a non-online context, individuals may have trouble making this connection if they are not personally acquainted with a person or if the interaction is anonymous (Kowalski et al., 2008).

5.3. Positive Online Experiences

Though the primary focus of this study is on victimization, which is nearly always a negative experience, the Internet also provides many positive possibilities for LGBTQ post-secondary students and the general population. Not wanting to discount positive online interactions and experiences, participants were asked about positive aspects of the Internet as well.
5.3.1.  *Education and Research*

As has been found in prior research (Varjas et al., 2013; Hillier et al., 2012; GLSEN et al., 2013), study participants often use the Internet as a resource. In this study, participants often view the Internet as a medium for exploring or forming different identities.

*Identity Investigation and Formation*

The Internet is described as an excellent way to investigate, test, and form an identity. Several participants discussed the advantages of the Internet in this regard, particularly when investigating a new sexual orientation or gender identity that they were not yet ready to embrace in the physical realm. Jeeves describes trying out new identities before coming out as trans:

**Jeeves:**  And like, you know, you can change your persona. You can try out new identities too. I mean, like, before I came out as trans, I had, like, a whole different MSN account for Jeeves. And, you know, I didn’t tell anybody that I was trans at the time, because I didn’t even know that it was, like, a thing. But, you know…

**Aynsley:**  But you were able to, like, put yourself out there.

**Jeeves:**  To try it. To see if it was right, and then move on.

Mercy revealed that her partner adopts male identities online, despite appearing as female in person. The flexibility and anonymity of the Internet allows for the presentation of one’s ‘true’ self, despite physical appearance. In fact, when their relationship first started (they met online), Mercy believed that her partner was male.\(^{16}\) Once the truth was revealed, Mercy was already in love with the person she thought she knew, and the relationship continued. They went from being in a long-distance relationship to now

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\(^{16}\) Acts like this are often referred to as ‘catfishing,’ a term popularized by the 2010 documentary film *Catfish*. The term is often used to refer to individuals who pose as individuals (either real or created) other than themselves online. Catfishing is generally related to romantic relationships, and the film has inspired a reality television program on *MTV* called *Catfish: The TV Show*. The program is currently in its second season, and follows a different person each week to determine whether his/her partner is in fact who s/he claims to be online (MTV, 2013).
living in the same province to be closer to each other. Mercy talks about the difference between their online and in-person interactions, both with each other and with others.

**Mercy:** The thing is that I, I, you know, you have that love, like feeling awful for them, ’cause um, it’s, you probably understand it, gender dysphoria, rather than just being gay. So, you know, she would give anything to be that guy. And so, you know, I hate to say it, but, I do have that level of pity, you know. Right, I mean, I felt bad, you know? And so, she considers herself a straight male, and I consider myself a straight female, and we just kind of deal with our own little world.

I’m kind of introverted. Like, I said, I don’t like to get bugged. And she’s very outgoing, and like “let’s hold hands in public.” And they’re not seeing what I’m seeing, like, they’re gonna look at us and see two gay females.

### 5.3.2. Community

As has been found in prior research (Kowalski et al., 2008; Berson et al., 2002; GLSEN et al., 2013), several participants discussed using the Internet to find a community. This often related to coming out or finding a community of LGBTQ individuals, as Damon describes in his interview. He discusses the difficulty of establishing trans communities in the physical sphere, and that the Internet is advantageous in that regard.

**Aynsley:** What do you think some of the advantages of online socialization are?

**Damon:** Um, I think particularly for the trans community, it’s really beneficial, because a lot of trans people connect, internationally and cross-provincially, across state lines. And I think it’s just the way the trans community is right now. So I think online is really significant for that.

**Aynsley:** Yeah.

**Damon:** I think it’s just, like, the layout of the trans community right now. Like, not a lot of people have a sense of a physical trans community in the cities. So there’s much more of, like, an online presence.

**Aynsley:** Like sort of the creation of a virtual community to fill that, almost?

**Damon:** A little bit, yeah. And I think that’s really temporal to now. Like, I think, I think the trans community is really evolving.
But it’s really important to have that Internet element right now.

The idea of an online community is also sometimes related to a more general community of likeminded people. Participants often described the increased reach of the Internet allowing them to branch out and talk to people in other cities and countries, and finding others with similar interests and causes.

**Aynsley:** What do you think some of the most advantageous or positive aspects of the Internet are for you?

**Gia:** Um, a sense of community. Like, when I was in high school, I was, uh, I guess I was like always being told I was being too sensitive to jokes and stuff. Like, “she has no sense of humour”... And everybody thought I was a lesbian ‘cause I was a feminist, and I am a lesbian, but I didn’t know it then, so they had no right to say that. And it was just really negative. And then I discovered this entire community of like-minded people on the Internet. And suddenly it didn’t matter if those people were standing behind me when I was telling people not to say those things, because I knew that they were out there and that I wasn’t just some crazy person with no perspective of, like, oh it’s actually okay to say those things. I had no idea.

Stemming from this, online communities are viewed by participants as an excellent way of generating and maintaining support, both for individuals and broader issues.

**Support**

Support in online communities is generally linked to coming out or forming an identity. Interviewees often expressed encountering a wealth of online support when entering new environments. Clark Kent describes finding the Internet overall to be an excellent place to find support and information when investigating a queer identity.

**Clark:** There is a really great queer community on there. And it, yes, and um, it really did serve it, it’s super queer. I did use it a lot as a support when I was, like, first investigating my own queer identity, and whether or not I did have sexual attraction towards the quote, unquote “same sex.”
Clark also discussed meeting individuals online who provided support and information, such as an individual in England she/he met through Tumblr. This person was able to provide her/him with information about taking testosterone to achieve greater gender ambiguity, and offered to meet Clark in person on a trip to the UK.

Jeeves addresses receiving support through online channels and also reciprocating by supporting other users.

**Jeeves:** Um, I’ve been able to meet a lot of people who either have similar interests to me, or um, are in sort of the same boat. ‘Cause it’s hard to find, like, I’m, I’m a trans guy, but I don’t necessarily fit into the binary of, like, I should be super masculine.

**Aynsley:** Okay.

**Jeeves:** I’m also dating somebody who’s genderqueer, and so it’s like, it’s positive in the aspect that you can meet people. It’s also, like, we YouTube blog our relationship so that people can understand or if people are in a similar situation there’s, like, they have that.

Online support was viewed as reciprocal, with interviewees stressing the importance of giving back to communities that helped them in the past. This also extends to in-person forms of support, with nearly all participants volunteering and/or engaging in activist activities.

### 5.4. Online Victimization

#### 5.4.1. Definitions

Just as cyber researchers have difficulty agreeing on a common definition for cyberbullying (Langos, 2012), study participants also see many problems with currently

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Clark requested to be referred to as she/he or her/him throughout the study to best reflect her/his identity. When asked how she/he wanted to be represented, she/he replied “if you could list me as gender neutral that would be great. However, if possible, I would like to avoid the use of “they” as it could come off as I’m trying to hide my gender. Instead I would like to be listed as she/he to represent both my genders.” Thus, the use of she/he and her/him is intentional in this thesis.
used terms and definitions. The consensus is that terms such as ‘cyberbullying,’ and ‘cybervictimization’ lack clarity and often minimize the harm experienced.

All participants are familiar with the term cyberbullying, and most feel that the term has some utility. Several interviewees, however, view the term as needing improvement or clarification, since it seems to encompass too many behaviours of varying levels of harm. Jeeves talked about how cyberbullying awareness ads often feature and/or are geared towards children, and how this can lead people to believe that cyberbullying cannot be experienced by adults. Damon and Jeeves both mentioned that the term bullying automatically makes them think of “kids” or younger people, despite their own beliefs that bullying can and does extend beyond this age group.

One of the biggest issues participants had with the term cyberbullying was the fact that it potentially minimizes serious harm and that it equates minor instances of online bullying with more serious occurrences. Gia discusses this in reference to homophobia and transphobia specifically.

**Aynsley:** What do you think about terms like cyberbullying or cyberharassment?

**Gia:** I dunno. I like them in that they, um, specify how it’s actually happening. Because I feel like it’s a very different creature, right? But, at the same time I feel like maybe they’re a little too vague. Uh, like, I remember with the Christy Clark campaign against bullying, I felt like it was just way too vague. I feel like we need to focus specifically on homophobia. Partly because that starts at home, just like racism, right?

**Aynsley:** Yeah.

**Gia:** It’s not the same as knocking over a kid ‘cause her bangs look stupid, or something, right?

**Aynsley:** Exactly.

**Gia:** And so, I, I feel like maybe it’s a little vague as far as that goes. Yeah, maybe you’re making fun of somebody because of their grammar. Or maybe you’re making fun of somebody ‘cause they’re trans. Those are really different things. And so I feel like there needs to be some distinction there.
Jeeves echoes this sentiment, arguing that current definitions and views on bullying are not sufficient to cover all experiences. He talks about having difficulty reconciling his own experiences with the terminology.

**Jeeves:** I mean, I understand what it is, obviously. And I understand that, like, I’ve experienced it all my life. Um, but I don’t know if, like, if what I experience now I would call bullying. Just because of the way that bullying has been minimized. Even though I know, based on definitions, it’s bullying. It’s bullying. And so, I don’t know.

Clearly there is some concern that the term may be too broad and may require some fine-tuning to reflect acts as they actually occur, rather than trying to use a one-size-fits-all definition. Conversely, Damon feels that current terminology may be too harsh for some people, and agrees that it may be worthwhile to seek additional terminology that fits subtle acts, while still acknowledging seriousness and potential harms.

**Damon:** Maybe a more nuanced, subtle term might be more helpful to people. Because most of the time it starts with something that’s small, and maybe it just sort of sticks to you for the rest of the day. So it would be good to have a term that validates that experience too.

Interestingly, cyberharassment is viewed by several participants as a preferable term. This relates to the difference between the terms bullying and harassment in the offline context, with cases of harassment often leading to criminal charges, while acts of bullying are perceived as more minor. Jeeves feels that, as long as the behaviour fit within the definition, the term harassment could potentially be used for more serious bullying incidents in school settings. Damon, however, thinks that the term could be somewhat problematic. While on the one hand it can encompass a wide variety of behaviours, he argues that individuals accused of harassment may be reluctant to accept the term.

**Damon:** Harassment sounds a bit intense. Maybe that might be so intense that it’s hard for people to use it and identify problematic interactions. Maybe bullying, that’s the case too, because it has a very “us vs. them” connotation. And those are very hard terms to mobilize again, too, because it’s really hard to tell someone they’re being the “them” in a dynamic ... So the term harassment might make you feel, like, afraid to accept what you did, or something.
5.4.2. **Venues in which Cyberbullying Most Often Occurs**

Cyberbullying was encountered in many different online settings, including chat rooms, MSN instant messaging, social networking sites (*Facebook, MySpace, Twitter*), video sharing sites (*YouTube*), movie review sites (*Rotten Tomatoes*), news sites (*The Vancouver Sun, The Province*), games (*Call of Duty, virtual worlds*), and blogs (*Tumblr*). Although homophobia and transphobia were encountered in each of these venues, it was most commonly experienced through *Facebook* posts, online gaming, and *YouTube* comments and videos.

All participants report current use of *Facebook*, with the majority using the site on a regular basis. Reported forms of victimization on *Facebook* include threats, use of transphobic slurs (e.g. ‘tranny’), and insult wars between groups of people. There is an additional level of discomfort with *Facebook* victimization, since it is not an anonymous site and in most cases the cyberbullies were friends or acquaintances. There were a few instances where unknown individuals posted rude comments due to changes in *Facebook* privacy settings, but these were rare. Knowledge of identity also played a role in Jeeves’ experiences, as in one case *Facebook* victimization extended into offline victimization when cyberbullies spotted him at the mall and said hurtful things about him nearby.

Fox and Mercy have both been exposed to victimization in online game environments. In Mercy’s in-game experiences, religious beliefs often play a role in homophobic comments.

Mercy: Yeah, we’ve had people come onto our game and try to give us the whole “God doesn’t love you” spiel. That’s a good one.

Aynsley: And do they come in, like, to the game specifically wanting to do that, or-

Mercy: No, yeah, and there, a lot of our administrators, you know, Peter, one of our co-owners is again, a very openly gay person. Brett, Christian, I mean they’re a couple, and they’re two of the administrators. They’re in the game with us. And they’re on, I mean they play with the players, and most of the players are fine with it, they love them. They’re like “you guys are so cute!” And, yeah, it’s no biggie, but then all of a sudden somebody comes on and is like “Oh,
you’re gay? Well that’s not acceptable. You’re gonna go to hell.”

Such cases were typically attributed to trolling, with players just wanting to get a rise out of LGBTQ individuals. Fox’s experiences with homophobic comments in Call of Duty were constant. Her profile and uniform emblems identify her as female and as a lesbian, and she is regularly barraged by slurs (e.g. dyke, lesbo, faggot) and threats of rape.

Fox: Just being female alone is bad enough. Being gay on top of it is, I’ve had people tell me that they hope I get raped.

Aynsley: And is this like, during game play?

Fox: Yes.

Aynsley: Wow.

Fox: Like, if I could find you, I’d come in and change you, I’d rape you. And they’ve actually said those words out loud.

Fox also experiences secondary cybervictimization when constantly being exposed to homophobic insults directed at male players, gay or straight. She states that ‘faggot’ is by far the most common insult used in-game, and that she hears the term repeatedly in every game.

Aynsley: Do you find, do they tend to jump on guys as well?

Fox: They jump on guys whether they’re straight or not. I mean, when it comes to when it comes to gaming like that, if you aren’t good, then you’re a fag. If you can’t um, if you have to throw grenades, if that’s the only way you can get kills instead of actually shooting somebody with a gun that would, which takes a little more precision, then you’re a fag.

Aynsley: So they just throw out homophobic insults?

Fox: Oh yeah. Constantly.

This likely relates to the commonly accepted nature of such heterosexist insults, as was found in Woodford et al.’s study (2012) of popular usage of homophobic phrases (e.g. “that’s so gay!”) and the effects on LGB college students.

18 “Trolls attempt to incite arguments, controversy, and disruption in online social contexts” (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009, pp. 37-38).
Surprisingly, *YouTube* emerged as one of the worst online venues. Homophobic and transphobic views are sometimes expressed through videos, but are more commonly present in comments responding to videos. Some comments are directed at videos with LGBTQ contributors or in support of LGBTQ causes. Examples of this include music videos by gay or lesbian artists or videos posted by activist groups. Others are posted in response to seemingly innocuous videos. For example, Gia got involved in a comment war with an individual in response to a video for a Celtic harp song. The initial debate related to the presence of the word ‘babes’ in the group’s name (and whether the use was sexist), and it led to comments related to reproduction and the need for men and women to procreate. When she accused him of being heteronormative, he argued that this was impossible, as he is gay (she is unsure if this is true or if he simply said it to stop the argument). Eventually she stopped responding, as it was clear nothing she could say would change his mind. Damon also described high levels of transphobic comments in response to trans-specific videos on *YouTube*, and talked about actively avoiding reading such comments.

**MySpace or Yours?: Do Safe Online Spaces Exist?**

There is a clear consensus among participants that there is no such thing as a truly safe online space. Some sites or modes of communication are viewed as safer than others, but online there is no sure-fire way to control what you encounter or what other people say/post. Mercy feels that *Facebook* is the closest thing to a safe space, since you can control access to your information and who sees what. She also points to the ability to block people and record information. She does, however, acknowledge that *Facebook* makes controlling your own space difficult, often changing privacy settings and making it difficult to change them back. Damon seconds this, arguing that the boundaries on *Facebook* are ever-changing, making it difficult to feel truly safe.

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19 This topic is addressed in reference to hip-hop culture in the recently released song *Same Love* (Macklemore and Ryan Lewis featuring Mary Lambert). The lyrics read: “If I was gay I would think hip-hop hates me. Have you read the *YouTube* comments lately? ‘Man, that’s gay’ gets dropped on the daily. We’ve become so numb to what we’re saying. Our culture founded from oppression, yet we don’t have acceptance for ’em. Call each other faggots from behind the keys of a message board. A word rooted in hate, yet our genre still ignores it. ‘Gay’ is synonymous with the lesser” (Macklemore & Ryan Lewis, 2012, track 5).
Clark Kent argues that *Tumblr* is the closest thing to a safe online space, given the ability to control what appears on your dashboard and who you follow. Fox also brought up the ability to use trigger warnings on *Tumblr* to avoid mentions of especially troubling content. Still, hurtful content sometimes slips through the cracks, and there is no guarantee that it will not be encountered at some point.

**Fox:** Even on *Tumblr*, the gayest site in the world, you will still find occasionally a bit of abuse. Um, especially toward gays, because there are some, you know, like Republicans in America who will get online and make a whole bunch of posts about how evil gays are. There’s a small conservative niche on *Tumblr*. And, um, they’re very adamantly and staunchly anti-gay.

There is agreement among participants that they have never personally experienced a safe space online. Clark Kent feels that, because online environments are shared, it is impossible to rely on other people for safety.

**Clark:** The spaces, you can’t really control what content you get. There’s no, there’s no guarantee ... So it’s not, there’s no safe spaces on the Internet, as far as I’m concerned.

Although this was the case, several interviewees believe that the creation of such spaces is possible. Fox argues that a safe space would have to be self-created and limited only to people you know and truly trust. Damon feels that boundaries would need to be clear and fixed, and that all members would have to agree to and abide by pre-set norms.

### 5.4.3. *Forms of Cyberbullying Most Often Experienced*

Homophobic and transphobic cyberbullying were perpetrated in many ways, and participants reported experiencing both overt and subtle forms in online contexts. Overt forms of online homophobia and transphobia include threats, slurs, hate speech, insults, and harassment. More subtle forms include heteronormative and heterosexist comments, inadvertent discrimination, and tolerance. Two of the most unique and widespread themes to emerge were those of cyberbullying within the LGBTQ community and discrimination through site design and by site administrators.
Can’t We All Just Get Along?: Cyberbullying within the LGBTQ Community

Though cyberbullying was perpetrated by many different individuals, one of the more unexpected findings was experiences with cybervictimization perpetrated by other members of the LGBTQ community. Such harassment is often experienced by trans participants, with Jeeves and Damon reporting the bulk of such occurrences. In such cases, cyberbullies were members of the LGB and/or trans community. Similar findings emerged in Dispenza et al.’s (2012) study of in-person career-related discrimination experienced by female-to-male trans adults. In their study, experienced discrimination was perpetrated by both LGB and trans individuals. Findings of transphobic actions perpetrated by the LGB community are not entirely surprising, as heterosexist beliefs are also sometimes held by LGB individuals (Weiss, 2003). When discussing transphobic bullying by members of the LGB community, Damon points to the current debate surrounding the presence of trans-males on social networking applications traditionally used by gay men.

**Damon:** There’s, well, there’s, like, an interesting source of dialogue going on right now about, like, trans male presence on social networking apps like *Grindr*, *SCRUFF*, or *GROWLr*.

**Aynsley:** Okay.

**Damon:** Uh, where there’s starting to become more of a presence. And, uh, but there’s also a lot of transphobia.

Damon also maintains that there is a certain lack of understanding of trans issues in the wider LGB community, arguing that a lot of the transphobia coming from them is unintentional and a result of wanting to be supportive but not knowing how.

Jeeves refers to trans on trans cyberbullying as a form of “queer community self-policing.” In such cases, transphobic comments often relate to individuals being perceived as “not trans enough to be trans.” For example, Jeeves often experiences discrimination and confusion because his partner is genderqueer, and many members of the trans community presume that he, as a trans-male, should be dating a woman. Damon reports similar experiences:
Aynsley: Do you notice a lot of in-fighting within the trans community?

Damon: Uh, yeah. Because there’s a lot of, there’s a lot of different groups, um, a lot of pressure for trans guys to be straight, and then when they’re gay there’s pressure to be gay a certain way, there’s expectation that trans guys are all going to be, like, submissive bottoms, and that’s not how they all roll.

Aynsley: Norms and expectations.

Damon: Yeah. Layers on top of the trans experience.

Damon explained that trans people are not always on the same page about issues, definitions, or concerns, which can lead to disagreements. Jeeves experienced this firsthand, when experiencing backlash following a Facebook post about gender neutral washrooms. He argues that, while the initial intentions of such posts are often positive, they can lead to hateful comments and a less cohesive community.

Jeeves: I dunno, it’s both a good and a bad thing. ‘Cause it gets people going. But it also fractures the groups.

Aynsley: Like, from an outsider’s perspective, that can affect perceptions too.

Jeeves: Yeah, like “all trans people are mean.”

Ultimately, such in-community debate and discord is perceived as more harmful than helpful.

Who/What are You?: Discrimination through Site Design

While discrimination was often perpetrated by individuals, interviewees also feel that sometimes the sites themselves are to blame for homophobia and transphobia. This is experienced in several ways, with the most common forms being inability to form an online identity reflective of an offline identity, the presence of offensive tailored advertisements, and transphobic reactions to the posting of photographs.
Several participants point to the fact that a number of popular websites allow only very narrow identity options. Clark Kent discusses this issue in relation to Facebook specifically.20

Clark: Um, on Facebook there’s an option to be they. It’s not, there’s not an option to be gender-nonconforming. There’s not an option to be neither. Um, all these sites are still very much so constructed from a, um, or can be very much so constructed from a larger societal perspective. So, that facilitates my capacity to interact with this world overall, once again, uh, the majority of the world still apparently is self-identifying as predominantly heterosexual.

She/he also pointed to OKCupid, a queer Vancouver dating site, as being an offender in this regard. While you can seek a same sex partner, the site still only allows you to select male or female as identity options. Participants reported being surprised when sites offered additional options, as Jeeves encountered on an old website called Vampire Freaks, where options extended beyond straight and gay. It is unfortunate that more sites do not take a flexible stance on orientation and identity, as it can be very difficult to have to accept an online identity that does not fit with your offline persona.

Mercy talked about how online ads generated as a result of your browser history could be considered an invasion of privacy, but Jeeves goes one step further, arguing that the ads can actually be an instance of transphobic bullying.

Jeeves: I mean, if you do online shopping. Well, like, I’ve, the ads are kind of bullying. ‘Cause I talk about trans things. And the ads are like, “She-males”, and like, all of these ads are double-ended sex toys. And I’m like, you know, they’re kind of bullying in themselves, and harassing.

The presence of such ads can be disturbing, not only because it is evidence that your online footprint is being tracked, but also because they can reduce an individual to a single title, and presume that everyone who falls into that category is alike. While some ads may be completely innocuous (such as advertisements for a sale at an online store

20 All Out organization recently created an online petition protesting Facebook’s current gender identity policy (All Out, 2013). The influence of this petition remains to be seen, as the settings remain unchanged.
you frequent), others may be disturbing or triggering, with words or images that do real
damage.

Finally, Jeeves also discusses discrimination on Facebook related to the removal
of shirtless pictures of trans-men.

**Jeeves:** There’s this whole thing with the trans-man community,
where I can post a shirtless picture if I want to. And like, I
still have a little bit of chest. But it’s mostly gone. And I
can post a shirtless picture on Facebook. Now, I’m very
thin. Now, I have friends who are larger, who have had
surgery to remove their breasts. And they want to post
pictures on Facebook. And Facebook tags them as
inappropriate, because Facebook says “well, now you’re
showing a female chest.” And so, we’ve, like, you know,
that’s bullying.

Jeeves also points to the irony of allowing young girls to post pictures of themselves in
tiny bikinis, showing far more skin than is shown in any of the photos that have been
tagged. Bikini shots often show substantial amounts of cleavage and sometimes even
bare buttocks, yet they are not tagged as inappropriate. The double-standard here is
clear, as is the discrimination.

### 5.4.4. **Responses to Online Homophobia and Transphobia**

**Impact of Experiences and Coping Mechanisms**

When discussing the impact of cybervictimization, participants reported feeling
angry, annoyed, or upset. Although they are bothered by homophobic or transphobic
comments, most participants reported being able to handle them and putting them in
perspective. Fox talks about how homophobic language in *Call of Duty* annoys her more
than anything.

**Fox:** I don’t really get angry at what they say.

**Aynsley:** It doesn’t bother you?

**Fox:** It annoys me after awhile if they keep it up constantly. It
gets annoying. I won’t deny that. But, um, I’ll just go to a
different lobby. I just won’t play with that person anymore.
I’ll just go somewhere else. But like, I’m gonna be 37 this
year, so I’ve been abused for a very long time. I’m used to
the, the online abuse, I’m very used to the in-person abuse.
She feels that, since she can leave the situation and never have to interact with these people offline, it is pointless to dwell on their behaviour. Gia reports initially feeling very angry, but then debriefing with supportive individuals to ask for opinions on responses made.

Aynsley: How did you feel following these experiences?

Gia: Um, I guess the first thing, like, I feel angry about it. And then usually I would go talk to people who I know are supportive. And they would sort of, uh, give their opinions on what I’ve said and what the other person said. ‘Cause I think right after anger, I feel a lot of self-doubt. Where I think that was part of what, I think that’s partly due to my high school experience where people were always telling me that I was wrong, and I had no backup. And so I wanna make sure that I’m not being a huge jerk about this, and, like, not thinking straight, or whatever.

The reported impacts appear to be relatively minor when compared with the serious impacts often found in past cyberbullying studies (Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Kowalski et al., 2008). There may be several reasons for this. First, it may be that participants were uncomfortable discussing the true impact of their experiences, either because they wanted to minimize the harm experienced or because they found it too difficult to discuss. Second, due to the retrospective nature of many examples discussed, it is also possible that the experiences and their effects were difficult to recall. Third, the minor impacts may be due to the age of participants and their lifetime experiences with harassment; they may have, over time, developed better coping skills. Jeeves discussed an increased calmness when dealing with hurtful Internet speech, equating this with age and experience. Finally, such impacts may be due to concerted efforts on behalf of participants to avoid certain settings that may be triggering. This was reported by Damon, who said he avoided reading YouTube comments for this very reason.

Official Responses

Some participants discussed seeking official responses to combat online harassment. Examples include blocks, kicks, bans, and reporting homophobic or transphobic comments to administrators.
Blocking: Useful or Cowardly?

Blocking other individuals from sites was generally discussed in relation to Facebook, but it also came up in the context of online games. Jeeves reported blocking multiple people from his Facebook page, and Gia blocked someone from her page as well. In each of these cases they attempted to reason with the individuals and blocked them as a last resort. Mercy agrees that blocking people on Facebook is permissible, but that doing so in a game leaves you open to ridicule.

**Mercy:** I mean, blocking is something that nobody, once you get outside the normal box, which is, like Facebook, and that sort of thing, blocking is something that nobody will ever do. Because it means that you’re a wimp. It means you’re giving up. So, I mean, on Facebook, to block is, you know, a good thing, because it’s keeping people out of your private stuff. But anywhere else, nobody’s gonna do it.

Kicks and Bans

Kicks and bans typically relate to either chat rooms or online games. These actions are taken by operators to control inappropriate online behaviour. Mercy and Fox discussed their experiences with keeping the online peace, as Mercy currently works for an online game company and Fox was previously employed as a chat room channel operator. General protocol involves a warning, followed by a kick (kicking someone out of a game or the chat room). After being kicked they can return to the site as soon as they want to. If this does not work and the behaviour continues, bans are used as a last resort. Bans usually start at one day, but can be set higher depending on the situation.

Report Away, but Don’t Expect a Helpful (or Any) Response

Both Jeeves and Gia reported inappropriate content to site administrators. Jeeves reported several comments to Facebook, while Gia reported an offensive review to Rotten Tomatoes (a film review site). Jeeves reported several offensive comments and threats from a former friend, only to receive a less than helpful response.

**Jeeves:** We ended up reporting several things to Facebook.

**Aynsley:** What did Facebook end up doing about it?

**Jeeves:** Um, nothing.

**Aynsley:** Nothing? Really?
**Jeeves:** Nothing. They sent me, um, ‘cause I was like, you know, “this is hate talk. This is hate speech.” I’m a gender studies major, so I formulated, like, this big long thing. And um, I was like “this is actually illegal.”

**Aynsley:** Yeah.

**Jeeves:** And, um, they’re like, you know “we don’t find anything wrong with this. We don’t find that this is hate speech, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. So we can’t actually do anything.” Or we won’t.

Gia reported a film review of *Southern Comfort*, a 2001 documentary about a trans-male with ovarian cancer, to *Rotten Tomatoes*, as she felt the review was completely inappropriate. Not only did the reviewer use the incorrect pronoun when referring to the trans-male in the film, but his language was insensitive and provided no information about the quality of the film.

**Gia:** All it says is, apparently, like, you can remove the uterus from the girl, but, like, you can’t remove her gonads. And that was the whole comment. So it’s nothing about the movie.

Gia enlisted help from friends on her blog, and a large group of them submitted individual complaints about the review. None of them received any response, not even to say the complaints had been received. The review was not removed.²¹

**Activism and Response to Online Homophobia and Transphobia**

Several participants identify as activists in the LGBTQ community. This is common in the wider LGBTQ community, and Dispenza et al. (2012) found that trans study participants often engaged in activist activities as a coping mechanism to deal with victimization. While interviewees in the current study agree that online homophobia and transphobia are problematic, their responses and opinions differ somewhat. Two themes emerged in the activist realm: the role of education, both as a response and in general, and expectations associated with being an activist.

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²¹ The review is still available online. It reads “Apparently, you can remove the breasts off a girl but not her female gonads” (*Rotten Tomatoes*, 2013).
**Education: To Engage, or Not to Engage; That is the Question**

Interviewees are split on whether they feel that education is an advantageous or preferred response to cybervictimization. Gia is very pro-education, engaging in comment exchanges with individuals who post offensive content. She often does this to seek clarification, and to determine whether the person’s intentions match up with her perceptions. To keep things from spiralling out of control and to ensure she is not wasting her time, she employs a rule for dealing with such individuals.

**Gia:** And um, I’ve developed, like, a rule of three. Which is, after three sort of abusive, like, borderline responses from a person, assuming that they’ve also been providing reasons for their perspective. After the third message I just ignore them. And that’s because, at that point I’ve decided that they’re just sort of trolling me, they just want to agitate me.

Jeeves also reported experiences where he attempted to deal with cyberbullying through education. In these cases, the posts were perceived to be unintentionally transphobic, so he aimed to use education to explain the offensive nature of the posts.

Damon is reluctant to use education as a means of dealing with online transphobia, preferring instead to avoid engagement.

**Aynsley:** How do you typically respond if you notice something transphobic online?

**Damon:** I don’t engage. That’s my, like, way. And people are like, “don’t you want to educate someone?” And I’m like “no, that’s, like, it’s not my job to educate the world.” Like, um, that would make my day dictated by the crazy people of the Internet. And given how many crazy people of the Internet there are, like, literally, that could take up all of my day, every day.

Clark Kent agrees with this, stating that sometimes she/he avoids responding to posts due to the extreme backlash expected. She/he talked about often wanting to respond, but feeling like it was a never-ending process with no sense of closure. Similarly, Mercy generally avoids online conflict, but does speak up on occasion. Damon is also of the opinion that education is ineffective unless you are certain that the other person is receptive to it.
Damon: I only educate people who are demonstrating an openness to it. Even if they’re my friends, like, I, I mean, if they’re my friends they’re going to hear something. If they’re transphobic. But, like, I only enter into the education process if I feel like someone wants it. I think it’s important to be consensual about that.

He does, however, acknowledge that someone has to do it. He is grateful that other users are willing to educate and engage, but it is not something he is comfortable doing himself.

Life as a “Professional Queer”: Expectations from the Activist Community

Several participants discussed feeling pressured to respond to offensive online comments. This often relates to being openly queer or trans, with an online identity reflective of in-person sexual orientation or gender identity. Jeeves discusses feeling pressures from the activist community both in person and online, but being able to sometimes use the Internet to escape and control such pressures.

Jeeves: Not everybody wants to be a professional queer all the time. It’s easier to deal online, like, I’ve come to terms with that, like, basically that’s what my life is going to be. Like, I’m going to be a professional queer. My work is going to be about queer things, I’m going to be queer in my life.

Aynsley: Yeah.

Jeeves: Professional queer. I don’t, I don’t always want to be a professional queer. Sometimes I just want to lay on the couch with my cats.

Jeeves also points to the fact that if you are an activist in one online space, you have to be prepared to back up those views elsewhere online. If others know about your views and identity/orientation, they often expect you to respond to discriminatory posts. Such discussions often relate to the above theme of cyberbullying within the LGBTQ community, where “the activists attack those who are not activist enough.”

A discussion of responses to victimization is incomplete without addressing the potential reasons for homophobic and transphobic cyberbullying. This leads to the role
of neutralization theory and the current study, with a particular focus on perceived reasons for victimization.

5.5. Homophobic and Transphobic Cyberbullying and Theory

Techniques of neutralization emerged in participants’ accounts of perceived reasons for homophobia and transphobia in cyberspace. While it is not 100% clear whether these neutralizations were indeed employed by cyberbullies (except for cases where bullies made their intentions very clear), it is noteworthy that such themes emerged in the accounts of cybervictims. It is possible that bullies may apply similar techniques to those provided by victims. Additionally, techniques were present in some of the actions of interviewees, as well as in their responses to cyberbullying. Techniques potentially related to themes include denial of the victim, denial of injury, denial of responsibility, and appeals to higher loyalties.

5.5.1. Perceived Reasons for Online Homophobia and Transphobia

When discussing their experiences with homophobic and transphobic cyberbullying, participants believe they occurred for several reasons. Some participants have fairly good ideas of why they were bullied, or were told outright by perpetrators. Others could only guess based on the content or context of posts and discussions. Perceived reasons include religious beliefs, strong opinions, mean-spiritedness, impulsivity, ignorance, exhibitionism/presence of an audience, lack of boundaries, anonymity, and disconnect. The most prevalent reasons are disconnect or detachment in online contexts, strong opinions about homosexuality and transgenderism, and the wider societal acceptance of transphobia.

Disconnecting on the Internet: “The Theory of the Dickwad” and Other Tales

All participants pointed to the ease at which individuals can detach themselves and their behaviours when online. This generally tied into the anonymity afforded by the Internet, as well as the fact that offline consequences are either not apparent or far
Several interviewees pointed to the lack of real-world cues missing in online discussions, such as body language, tone of voice, and facial cues. It is often difficult to gauge responses at all, let alone severity of response. Clark Kent points out that this is especially problematic if you do not have an offline relationship with the person.

Clark: I mean, we call them by their username, and it’s that, that identity on the Internet that we’re getting pissed off at. Not, not the actual person behind the screen. Unless we know that person. Then we can link it to another identity.

The non-linear nature of the Internet can also be problematic, as people are often receiving communications at later times, which may affect how far removed the perpetrator is from the situation and possible repercussions.

Jeeves: You can say things without, um, without immediate consequences. But also, you can say things that you don’t, because they don’t have immediate consequence, but they can impact you later on.

Several participants argue that the Internet brings out the worst in people. This is linked to specific aspects of the Internet encouraging people to say things they likely would not say offline. Gia has her own theory about this phenomenon.

Aynsley: And what do you think some of the more negative aspects of the Internet are, just sort of generally?

Gia: Um, it’s uh, it’s this theory of the dickwad. Which is, like, anonymity plus an audience equals dickwad. Some people who just spew stuff, and you know they would never say it to you in real life. They just have some gibberish username, and no profile picture, and they just go out there and try to ruin everything for you.

She also discusses the troubling tendency of people to distinguish their online activities from offline ones by using the term IRL (in real life) to delineate offline experiences. She reached an epiphany when watching a documentary on the subject.

Gia: Um, actually, I watched a documentary once on the *Pirate Bay*, and it was by them. And it was called *The Pirate Bay*

22 *Pirate Bay* is a popular bittorrent site that allows for illegal downloads of software, music, movies, and games through peer-to-peer online file sharing.
AFK, and I didn’t know what that meant, but it’s actually during the documentary, someone says IRL. And they’re like, “well, actually, we don’t say IRL, in real life, we say away from keyboard [AFK], because the Internet is real life.” Like, it is real life! This is your actual life, and what you do on it is going to impact others and impact you. You have to behave accordingly. But yeah, like, saying IRL I feel sort of backs up these people who just say whatever they want on the Internet.

This IRL vs. online distinction may allow cyberbullies to separate themselves from their online actions and minimize harm experienced by victims.

This theme relates most clearly to denial of the victim as a neutralizing technique. Sykes and Matza (1957) and Siegel (2013) argue that settings where the victim is not known, not known well, or not present can lead to use of this technique. The Internet is certainly this type of setting, where even if the victim is known to the perpetrator they could be considered to be ‘absent.’ Given the IRL vs. online distinction employed by many, the idea of an absent victim is even more likely. Due to the inability to experience a victim’s reaction in full, there is also potential for denial of injury to be employed with this motivation. In such cases, harm can be denied or minimized due to the inability or unwillingness to see it.

Opinions are Like Assholes: Everyone Has One, and They’re Not Afraid to Share Them on the Internet

Several participants are of the mindset that online homophobia and transphobia often stem from strong personal opinions and deeply held beliefs. Some interviewees feel that people are entitled to their own opinions, as long as they do not force them on others.

Mercy: We don’t have a problem with my friend Steve, you know, who’s like “I don’t think it’s natural. I don’t think it’s cool, I don’t want it in my face.” But he does it very eloquently, like, he doesn’t- I’m like, that’s fine. Like, go for it, right? All opinions are welcome, but there’s no need to go around, like, fucking bad mouthing people.
Others feel that, while individuals are entitled to their own beliefs, they can control their associations with and exposure to them. Jeeves reported ending online friendships over strong clashes in beliefs, particularly if they related to his trans status.

**Jeeves:** I, I had somebody, like, um, I haven’t had chest surgery, but my chest has, like, it looks like a regular chest now. Um, because of hormones. And, um, I had a shirtless picture, and somebody from high school that was on my Facebook, that I didn't even actually know was on my Facebook was like “oh, so now you’re, like, pretending that you’re a guy and just showing your tits on Facebook?” And I was like “excuse me?” Like, first of all, I’m openly trans. Like, my Facebook says I’m trans everywhere! I have trans tattoos, like, why would you say something like this? And they’re like “well, I don’t believe in trans people.” And I’m like “well, okay, well then I don’t think we can be friends.” ‘Cause, like, if you can’t believe that I’m a real person, then I can’t be friends with you.

While several participants are pro-education, they realize that some opinions are difficult, if not impossible, to change. Gia relates this to her own beliefs, understanding that the strength of her own convictions is unlikely to be easily changed.

**Aynsley:** What do you think the experiences were motivated by?

**Gia:** Um, I think they were motivated by the same sort of things that I’m motivated by. Just, like, deep-seated beliefs that would be really hard to change in that person. Like ... I’m totally not okay with cisnormativity, for example. And I’m probably never going to be. And I’m fine with that. Some people aren’t. But I’m not okay with their transphobia, for example.

She does, however, acknowledge that it is always worth trying. While some people may be unwilling to listen or accept other viewpoints, others may be more receptive. Gia believes it is worth attempting to clarify opinions or educate individuals, even if they only take a single part away from her larger argument.

The technique of neutralization most applicable to this theme is denial of the victim. Given strong homophobic or transphobic beliefs, individuals may feel that victims are deserving of abuse, and that victimization is simply righting the wrongs they have inflicted on society. Denial of the victim often includes labelling the victim as deserving, and often leads to an emphasis on dissimilarities between the victim and perpetrator.
Past authors (Sykes & Matza, 1957; Turgeman-Goldschmidt, 2009) argue that this technique may be particularly applicable to acts perpetrated against minority groups and homosexuals, making denial of the victim particularly fitting if bullies have strong anti-LGBTQ beliefs.

**What Do You Mean, That’s Transphobia?: Societal Acceptance of Transphobia**

Several participants think that transphobia often occurs due to a wider societal acceptance of transphobic behaviour. While overt homophobia has become much less acceptable, transphobia has not followed the same trend. Damon discusses how popular culture’s emphasis on transphobia as a joke or humorous concept may lead the wider society to view such actions as acceptable.

**Aynsley:** Does transphobia tend to be anonymous in your experiences online?

**Damon:** Um, no, no. Uh, transphobia is very accepted as a form of, humour right now ... So many mainstream movies, like, at least one a year will come out with something really explicitly transphobic. And there won’t be any narrative to, like, act as though that was an absurd thing to see.

**Aynsley:** Like, not the same backlash you’d see for something very homophobic or racist.

**Damon:** Yeah, exactly. The, that wouldn’t survive in this political climate right now. But we’re in a time and a climate that is supportive of that. So people don’t feel, like, it’s not the sort of thing, if people harbour those feelings and thoughts, that they feel the need to hide them. It’s not shameful right now.

Damon argues that the majority of these jokes were at the expense of trans-women. Such comedic moments often consist of male characters believing they are with a woman only to realize later (either when engaging in sexual activities or afterwards) that
their partner is in fact trans. This is generally followed by expressions of disgust and jokes at the male character's expense.\textsuperscript{23}

This also relates to the above discussion of discrimination through site design. Trans identities are often not available on social networking sites, while different sexual orientations generally are. Transphobic slurs are commonly used, both on and offline. Both Jeeves and Damon discussed encountering the slur ‘tranny’ very often, generally being used by people outside of the trans community. Damon talked about how most people do not even define it as a slur, and Jeeves had an example of Facebook cyberbullying related to the term.

\textbf{Jeeves:} And so, this one kid ... posted something, he used the word tranny, which if you’re trans, and you identify yourself as a tranny, that’s fine. Um, that’s your choice, but you cannot use the word tranny if you’re not part of the community, like, if you’re not identifying as trans ... Even, like, among a lot of trans people it’s a dirty word. And so, this kid doesn’t identify as trans, he identifies as, like, a gay guy. And so, he uses the word tranny, and, like, he posted this huge thing that was, like, um, really, I don’t remember what it said completely, but it was using tranny as an offensive word.

Damon links the heavy use of such slurs to ignorance, stating that many people do not realize the offensiveness of transphobic comments and slurs.

\textbf{Damon:} The slur tranny right now is not even considered a slur by most people ... Ignorance is, like, hugely a factor with that issue. People just don’t get it. And it seems like a way of expressing masculinity sometimes, so, really, you know, to be disgusted by it. It’s still, you know, it’s like the 80s or something for gay people.

\textsuperscript{23} A recent example of this is in the feature film, \textit{The Hangover Part II} (2011), part of the popular three-part comedy franchise. In the film, set in Thailand, one of the main characters (Stu) engages in anal sex with a trans-female prostitute while inebriated. He believes that she is female until he wakes up next to the prostitute and realizes she has a penis. This leads to several transphobic lines (“I made love to a man with boobies” and “I got fucked in the ass by a girl with a dick”) and jokes at Stu’s expense, which continue into the third film, released in 2013 (\textit{The Hangover Part III}). The transphobic content in the second film resulted in a petition being sent to Warner Brothers requesting an official apology. The petition closed in 2011 without a response (Lobeck, 2011; Michelson, 2011; Change, 2013).
Jeeves agrees that sometimes the use of such terms is linked to not knowing any better, so he often assumes innocent intent and aims to educate people who use the terms incorrectly.

For this theme, several techniques of neutralization could apply. First, denial of injury could come into play if transphobic attitudes are shared by an individual’s network of peers and family members (particularly if parents/guardians share these opinions). Denial of the victim is also applicable, since this technique is particularly common when minority groups are victimized (Turgeman-Goldschmidt, 2009; Sykes & Matza, 1957). It is also easy to distance oneself from the victim if they are dissimilar, and, in cases of inadvertent transphobia, bullies are not part of the trans community. Finally, it is possible that cyberbullies who fit into this category do not employ techniques at all. As Ingram and Hinduja (2008) posited in their study of music piracy, if the majority of individuals do not view an act as wrong, then it is possible that they do not feel the need to neutralize their actions in any way.

5.5.2. Techniques of Neutralization Applied to the Actions of Interviewees

Two participants (Mercy and Fox) discussed victimizing others online, though not explicitly identifying such activities as cyberbullying. These actions were generally in response to the actions of others, and were sometimes forms of retaliations following cybervictimization. This is similar to Varjas et al.’s (2013) finding that LGB adolescents generally used cyberbullying as a way to fight back or cope with their own cybervictimization. Interestingly, both participants are online gamers. It is possible that such activities are common in online gaming culture or that the rates of in-game victimization are so high that they feel the need to respond. Mercy discusses how her and her friends had a habit of trolling sites when they felt they could get a rise out of individuals.

**Mercy:** I’m sure you’ve heard of trolling?

**Aynsley:** Yeah.

**Mercy:** Anyone who has a sense of humour online is gonna troll on something. So it’s gonna happen. Especially if you’re with
people who get upset really fast, and you’re like “it’s too easy.”

Her group’s habit of trolling is not necessarily mean-spirited, and often stems from them expressing opinions counter to those expressed on the sites or games visited. This led to frequent bans, and encouraged them to develop their own game with their own rules. Their in-game rules are much looser than most, and allow for swearing and the expression of most opinions, as long as they are not hateful.

Fox generally deals with in-game victimization through humour and sarcasm, mocking rude players to herself and after the fact to her friends. The abuse (particularly if it lacks originality), however, sometimes becomes frustrating, and leads her to kill others in the game. While it is not particularly deviant to kill members of the opposing team (depending on the structure of game being played), she also kills her own teammates if they are being abusive.

**Fox:** Well, you can always tell how smart somebody is by what they laugh at.

**Aynsley:** True.

**Fox:** And they always laugh when somebody calls me a lesbo. They think that is fucking hilarious. I’m like “really? (sarcasm). That was just amazing, I don’t know how you come up with such things!” Really. I don’t understand why they can’t come up with something more creative to at least amuse me. If you’re going to insult me for half an hour, just amuse me while you’re doing it. I mean, be creative. If they aren’t creative enough I start killing them. Even if they’re on my own team, I don’t care. If they’re on my own team, I will still kill them. I mean, after you kill three people on your own team you get kicked out of the game, but I just, it’s just a video game. I don’t care enough. I’m not concerned about my kill-to-death ratio.

The most applicable neutralization technique for this theme is denial of the victim. Victims of prior harassment directed at themselves or others may feel justified in retaliating against bullies. Such acts of revenge are seen as righting wrongs, and those who engage in victim denial may view themselves as the hero and their target as a villain. Denial of injury is clear in Mercy’s quote that anyone who has a sense of humour trolls online. This is an example of the “everybody does it” claim that is commonly associated with denial of injury. Finally, given that both Fox and Mercy discussed
witnessing homophobia directed towards their friends, it is possible that they employed the appeal to higher loyalties neutralization. In this case, people may argue that they “did it for their friends” or that they “have to protect their friends” from initial or further harm.

It is clear that the experiences of study participants are wide-ranging. Interviewees do, however, share several similarities. Instances of current and past online victimization were common as were positive online experiences. Though participants visit different sites and come from different backgrounds, some of their accounts are strikingly similar. With this in mind, the next chapter addresses the strengths and limitations of this study as well as future research directions.
6. Conclusion

This section covers the strengths and limitations of this study, as well as future related research directions, followed by some final concluding thoughts.

6.1. Strengths

A key strength of this study is the explicit focus on LGBTQ individuals and cyberbullying. While past studies have acknowledged the potential differences in bullying experienced by members of this group, the bulk of studies have examined them in conjunction with heterosexual individuals (Wensley & Campbell, 2012; Lindsay & Krysik, 2012; Finn, 2004), often as part of a larger scale study about a related topic. Focusing solely on the LGBTQ experience is advantageous because their experiences do not take the backseat to a larger sample of heterosexual students, and instead are given the attention they deserve. This allowed me to examine their experiences in great detail, and to ask questions related to their orientations and identities. Though I would have welcomed heterosexual participants who fit the inclusion criteria, none contacted me, thus leaving me with an entirely LGBTQ sample. This is both unique and beneficial, setting this study aside from most research in this area.

An additional strength of this study is its qualitative, exploratory nature. Because little research has addressed the topic of post-secondary student’s experiences with online homophobia and transphobia specifically, it was important to determine what participants have experienced in the past and are still experiencing. Allowing interviewees to express such experiences in their own words and elaborate on them was very beneficial, and provided a wealth of valuable data. The few studies that have addressed the topic of LGBTQ individuals and cyberbullying are either predominantly or entirely quantitative (Varjas et al. 2013), so it was exciting to get rich, detailed information on this topic. Finally, the in-depth, semi-structured interview style allowed for
flexibility in questions and topic coverage, allowing the interviews to lead to unexpected and interesting areas. Such data would not likely be uncovered in a quantitative survey study, even if researchers allowed for open-ended responses.

On a related note, a further strength of this study is the care taken to allow participants to identify themselves, control their representation, and have their voices heard as intended. Allowing participants to select their own pseudonyms gave them control over their study identity, rather than having it imposed on them by me assigning them an arbitrary name or number. Interviewees were also able to control how their sexual orientation and gender identity would be represented, including their preferred pronouns. This is a shortcoming of much research with LGBTQ populations, particularly if the study is designed with a broader population in mind. Participants are often given set boxes to check, and they may not fit within the proscribed categories. While there is sometimes an “other” option, individuals who select this option are sometimes clumped together as a homogeneous category. Allowing participants to state their identity preferences in their own words honours both their identity and their words, which is well deserved.

A final strength of this study is the focus on both current post-secondary and retrospective experiences, such as in middle school or high school. This allowed for lots of conversation surrounding online victimization, as well as about changes in technology and victimization over time. Although the majority of examples were post-enrolment in post-secondary institutions (likely because they were recent and more fresh in participant’s minds), interviewees also shared experiences from middle and high school, and compared them with more recent experiences. Though some research has examined post-secondary students’ experiences with cyberbullying, the few existing studies have generally focused entirely on accounts at the post-secondary level (Walker et al, 2011; Finn, 2004; Lindsay & Krysik, 2012; Wensley & Campbell, 2012).

6.2. Limitations

Each study has its share of limitations, and this one is no exception. The limitations of this study relate to recruitment and sampling difficulties. First, language of
the recruitment poster likely limited my pool of participants. The focus on post-secondary students may have confused potential interviewees, and it is possible that the requirement of current enrolment may have led readers to think that cyberbullying experiences had to also occur in the post-secondary arena. The line “investigating post-secondary students’ experiences with homophobia and transphobia in online environments” may also have contributed to such confusion. I tried to limit this confusion by putting these aspects of the study at the bottom of the poster (hoping that the items above would be accorded more importance), but in hindsight, the language could have been clarified further to reflect the study’s overall focus.

Related to the language of the posters is the language of the interviews. As a predominantly English-speaking individual I was unable to recruit or interview non-English speaking participants. Those with a minimal or no grasp of the English language would have been unlikely to read my recruitment posters and emails, thus limiting my sample to only English-speaking students. The language of the posters and emails, however, did not specify that the interviews would be conducted in English. Additionally, I did not have anyone contact me to inquire further about interview language. Therefore, it is difficult to discern how this influenced overall recruitment and interest.

The next limitation relates to the inclusion of post-secondary students only. By introducing this criterion, I excluded potential participants who fit all other inclusion criteria. Several interviewees mentioned this, as they had friends who fit the other criteria but were not current students. This is unfortunate, as it would have been helpful to include additional interested parties, even if they were not students. Conversely, I wanted to avoid being too broad in recruitment, and felt that focusing on the post-secondary element was important. First, university and college students are often avid computer and Internet users, both in educational and recreational contexts. Second, post-secondary students’ Internet use and online socialization is often similar to that of high school students, making comparisons between post-secondary and high school groups possible. Thus, although this is a weakness, it was a research decision I felt was important to make.

A further limitation of this study is the small sample size. My initial sample goal was a minimum of ten interviews, but it became clear after a semester of recruitment
difficulties that this would be no easy feat. After some creative recruitment attempts over
the second semester of interviews, my sample maxed out at six. While this may seem
small, the focus of this study may have deterred participation in multiple ways. First, the
focus is on bullying, which can be a difficult topic to discuss, even retrospectively.
Second, the focus on homophobic and transphobic bullying adds an additional layer of
pain, as bullying incidents are linked to sexual orientation or gender identity, and can be
even more damaging to victims. Finally, because the study was predominantly geared
towards LGBTQ participants, recruitment difficulties are common with this group.
Potential participants may be reluctant to discuss their experiences with a stranger, and
may fear further or re-victimization based on interviewer responses (Kong et al., 2003).
Sample sizes are often small in studies with exclusively LGBTQ participants (Varjas et
al., 2006; Dispenza et al., 2012; Varjas et al., 2013). While my sample size is small,
large samples are not in and of themselves indicative of quality findings. The current
study was certainly a case of quality over quantity, and the information received from
participants was rich and descriptive. Given the fact that interviews ranged from 45
minutes to nearly two hours, lack of data was not a problem.

6.3. Future Research Directions

Many interesting future research projects can be drawn from this study. First,
there is a need for research addressing other (non post-secondary) adult LGBTQ
populations and their experiences with cyberbullying. Potential settings include
workplaces, as studies have examined cyberbullying in the workplace (Privitera &
Campbell, 2009) and homophobia and transphobia in the workplace (Buddel, 2011), but
not their co-occurrence. Volunteer and activist organizations could also be interesting

24 This specific issue was discussed in a talk given by Dr. Sharalyn Jordan as part of the SFU
Faculty of Education’s faculty lecture series. In her lecture ("Researching in precarious times:
Doing justice with/in research with refugees seeking protection from homophobic and
transphobic persecution") Jordan discussed the concept of “N envy”, as many researchers
are concerned about sample size, or their small ‘N.’ While this may be very important in
quantitative research attempting to generalize findings to a wider population, Jordan stressed
that sample size is not the be-all-end-all of research. Rather, it is important to keep quality of
data in mind and to manage researcher burnout, particularly when conducting research with
minority populations concerning traumatic or harmful experiences.
settings, particularly LGBTQ organizations. Such organizations, given their identification and visibility, are more likely to receive homophobic and transphobic communications from outside sources. Additionally, given the prevalence of cyberbullying within the LGBTQ community in this study, there may also be instances of such victimization at the organizational level.

Second, given the findings related to subtle and overt homophobia in online games (particularly on the XBox network), there is a need for more research in this area. Given Fox’s constant experiences with heterosexist language, slurs, and threats in Call of Duty games, this is not an isolated experience. In fact, it appears as though such forms of in-game harassment are all-too-common (GLAAD, 2009). Since 20% of LGBT youth surveyed by GLSEN report accessing the Internet daily through video game systems (GLSEN et al., 2013), this area warrants research attention. It would be useful to study LGBQ gamers separately, and to address such factors as in-game identity and homophobia experienced while playing and/or in the system. It would also be interesting to discuss whether transphobia also exists in the online gaming community, and to interview trans gamers about their experiences. While such experiences were not reported in this sample, examples likely do exist and it would be interesting to examine them.

Given the surprising amount of homophobic and transphobic bullying perpetrated through online commenting platforms, it would be useful to perform content analyses of some of these sites. YouTube would be a good place to start, as study participants reported large numbers of harmful comments on the video sharing site. It may be advantageous to study the comments related to videos related to queer topics or causes, such as the It Gets Better and Make it Better projects. It would also be interesting to examine comments related to newspaper articles about LGBTQ topics, especially since these posts are not anonymous and are linked to poster’s Facebook accounts, full names, and picture. Finally, content analyses of Tumblr pages related to trans men on Grindr as well as trans activist pages could help flesh out some of the experiences mentioned by participants. Such studies could further examine the role of in-group hostility and victimization among LGBTQ community members.
Since the use of techniques of neutralization cannot be utterly confirmed through victim’s accounts, it would be helpful to seek the accounts of cyberbullies (particularly those who engage in homophobic and/or transphobic forms of bullying). Recruitment difficulties are to be expected in a study with this focus, so it may only be possible as part of a larger study of cyberbullies. Still, it would be very interesting to see what emerges from the accounts of bullies, and how similar their reasons are to those perceived by victims in this study.

Finally, future researchers should also take the positive aspects of the Internet into account. We have to keep in mind that the same features of the Internet that appeal to bullies may also appeal to vulnerable individuals, and they may be able to benefit from the presence of welcoming communities and forums. While focusing on the negative aspects may be more sensationalistic, focusing on the positive aspects gives us hope and a positive outlook for a potentially safer online future. It also avoids a skewed analysis in which only problems are deemed worthy of interest and in which people are seen as largely incapable of taking action, of coping.

It is clear from the findings of this study that not only does cyberbullying extend beyond high school, cyberbullying experienced by participants was anything but rare. Interviewees encountered cyberbullying throughout their lives, and continued to experience it as adult, post-secondary students. Participants also applied techniques of neutralization to instances of homophobic and transphobic cyberbullying, both in the role of victim and perpetrator. This is very interesting, as such techniques are generally associated with offenders who employ the techniques. It is possible, though, that bullies employ similar techniques prior to engaging in online bullying. Of the five techniques, four of the five proposed by Sykes and Matza (1957) were potentially applicable. The missing technique is condemnation of the condemners, which would be difficult to employ from a victim’s standpoint, since it often relates to authority figures in an accusatory position. Given the lack of professional intervention experienced by interviewees following harassment (even when it was requested), it is not surprising that this technique was not present. Similarly to Byers et al.’s (1999; 2004) study of hate crimes against the Amish, the most common techniques found were denial of the victim and denial of injury. Since online homophobia and transphobia sometimes includes hate speech, the connection here is somewhat predictable. Given Turgeman-Goldschmidt’s
(2009) assertion that cybercrimes often result in harm of an intangible nature, it is surprising that this theory is not applied in more studies involving online offences and victimization.

Study participants recounted online experiences of both the positive and negative variety, and generally coped with online harassment in a mature fashion. Interviewees often gave perpetrators the benefit of the doubt, assuming positive or neutral rather than negative intent. While these findings are promising, and point to high levels of resiliency, other findings are more troubling. The perception of a strong societal acceptance of transphobic views is saddening, as is the common nature of cyberbullying within the LGBTQ community. Discrimination through site design and administration is also concerning, since this is something that is seemingly easy to fix or change, yet it continues to be problematic (despite outside efforts at remedy, such as petitions). Ultimately, what this study provides us with is an important jumping off point. This information is useful for raising awareness of problems that exist, problems that persist, and problems that need less focus. Awareness is the first step, and it is definitely a step in the right direction. It is my hope that the next step will be a concerted effort to improve the Internet experiences of LGBTQ individuals, and that one day there will be some truly safe online spaces.
References


Jordan, S. (2013, March 14). Researching in precarious times: Doing justice with/in research with refugees seeking protection from homophobic and transphobic persecution. Faculty of Education Faculty Lecture Series. Lecture conducted at Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC.


Appendices
Appendix A

Participant Informed Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in the following study:

*MySpace or Yours?: Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying in Cyberspace*

(DORE Application 2012s1035)

**Principal Investigator:** Aynsley Pescitelli, Master’s student, School of Criminology, Simon Fraser University

**Faculty Supervisor:** Dr. Brian Burtch, School of Criminology, Simon Fraser University

**Director of the School of Criminology:** Dr. Robert M. Gordon

You are being asked to participate in an open-ended interview. The information collected through interviews will be used to gain an understanding of the nature of homophobic and transphobic cyberbullying, will aim to raise awareness of this issue, and will facilitate Ms. Pescitelli’s completion of her Master’s thesis in Criminology. This research may also be presented at a criminological/social science conference in the future.

If you have questions or concerns about this research, please contact Ms. Pescitelli at [email protected] or Dr. Brian Burtch (faculty supervisor) at [email protected] or [email protected]

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

To gain an understanding of the nature of homophobic and transphobic cyberbullying, as well as to raise awareness of this issue.

**PROCEDURE**

Participation in an in-depth interview (from 45 minutes to one hour and 30 minutes), in a location of your choosing, based around your experiences with homophobic and/or transfobic bullying in an online context.

**POTENTIAL RISKS & HARM**

While it is unlikely that any harm will result from participation in this study, there is the potential for some slight discomfort associated with recalling sensitive memories. You will be provided with contact information for qualified professionals in the Lower Mainland area if you should experience such discomfort.
POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS &/OR SOCIETY

You will be given the opportunity to share your stories and experiences to contribute to the current knowledge of cyberbullying. Their contributions could also serve to increase awareness of the problem of homophobic and transphobic cyberbullying. Because homophobic and transphobic forms of online bullying have been under-researched, this study has the potential to fill an important gap in this field.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any identifying information that is obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will only be disclosed with your permission. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity, and confidentiality will be guaranteed to the extent permitted by law.

Digital interview recordings, consent forms, and interview transcripts will be stored in separate locked filing cabinets in the researcher’s home. Digital recordings will be stored on a memory stick, while transcripts and consent forms will be stored in paper form. No electronic copies will be maintained. Recordings and transcripts will be stored in this manner until August 31, 2015, and will be destroyed on this date (recordings will be recorded over with ambient noise twice, and transcripts will be shredded).

PARTICIPATION & WITHDRAWAL

Participants have been recruited through posters advertising this study. You can choose whether to participate in this study or not. If you volunteer to participate, you may withdraw your consent at any time without consequence. You can choose to remove your information from the study. You can refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still be a part of the study. You may also refuse any future contact with the researchers.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You can withdraw your consent at any point and may cease participation without penalty. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Simon Fraser University Office of Research Ethics. To obtain the results of this study upon its completion, contact Aynsley Pescitelli at the Simon Fraser University School of Criminology by email at [email protected] or by telephone at [phone number]. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, responsibilities of researchers, or have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the manner in which you were treated during this study, please contact the faculty supervisor, Dr. Brian Burtch, at [phone number] or [email address], or Dr. Hal Weinberg, Director, Office of Research Ethics, by email at [email address] or phone at [phone number].

Do you consent to participate in this interview? Yes ___ No ___

Do you consent to have this interview recorded? Yes ___ No ___

If not, do you consent to the taking of detailed notes during the interview? Yes ___ No ___

Signature: ______________________________________  
Date: ____________________________________________

Participant Last Name: _____________________________
Participant First Name: _____________________________
Participant Preferred Contact Information: _____________________________
Appendix B

Study Details: Approved Ethics Application

*MySpace or Yours?: Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying in Cyberspace*

Principal Investigator: Aynsley Pescitelli
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Brian Burtch
Simon Fraser University
School of Criminology
Director: Dr. Robert M. Gordon

General Study Description

This exploratory, qualitative study seeks to examine post-secondary student’s experiences with homophobic and transphobic cyberbullying. There is a growing body of research on cyberbullying of students in general, but few researchers have focused on post-secondary students (Finn, 2004), particularly with respect to homophobic and transphobic forms of cyberbullying (Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012). The few studies that have been conducted in this area have also been highly quantitative in nature. There is a need for qualitative research in this field to expand on the existing quantitative studies and to give a voice to students’ experiences. General cyberbullying research indicates that bullying is experienced very differently by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer, and questioning (LGBTQQ) individuals (Cassidy, Jackson, & Brown, 2009; Finn, 2004; Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012), so it is important to give these experiences the attention they deserve. Additionally, there is a need for research that addresses homophobic and transphobic cyberbullying experienced by heterosexuals. This study will reveal how homophobic and transphobic cyberbullying is experienced by a sample of post-secondary students, provide ideas for future research in this area, and raise awareness about the problem of homophobia and transphobia in online environments.

Study Participants

Participants will be selected through purposive sampling because they need to meet certain requirements for inclusion. Intended participants are currently registered post-secondary students (both heterosexual students and those from the LGBTQQ community) in the province of British Columbia who have experienced homophobic and/or transphobic cyberbullying. Participants who are registered at Simon Fraser University are considered adults for the purposes of research participation, even if they are under the age of 19. Participants registered at other institutions must be 19 years of age or older.

Participants will not be minors, from captive populations, or require third party permission to participate. Participants will be given consent forms to sign. They have the right to withdraw their participation at any point, and may refuse future contact with the researcher. The researcher has no authority over participants’ judgment and no right to coerce participants in any way.
Data Collection

Participants will be recruited through posters put up at post-secondary institutions throughout the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. Posters will be placed on common bulletin boards as well as in “queer-friendly areas” (e.g. Out on Campus, Women’s Centres). A non-SFU contact email address will be provided on the posters, and interested participants who reply to the poster will be provided with information about the study and participation through email. They will also be provided with a contact phone number for the principal investigator if they should have further questions.

In-depth, in person interviews will be conducted with participants. Interviews will be conducted at sites of each participant’s choosing, and will range in length from 45 minutes to one hour and 30 minutes (depending on questions asked and level of participant interest). Participants will be asked if they are willing to have interviews recorded. If they agree, interviews will be recorded on a digital MP3 recorder. If they are not comfortable being recorded, detailed field notes will be taken throughout the interview. An interview schedule will be developed but due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, the conversation may deviate from the original schedule due to participant responses. Interview questions predominantly focus on Internet use, experiences with in-person bullying, and experiences with cyberbullying. Participants will be informed of their right to revoke their consent at any time and to refuse to answer any questions.

Data Storage and Confidentiality

Interviews will be transcribed and anonymized immediately following each session. Any identifying information will be removed and pseudonyms will be inserted to ensure confidentiality. Confidentiality will be guaranteed to the extent it is permitted by law. Digital MP3 recordings will be stored on a password-protected memory stick in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher’s home until August 31, 2015. No additional digital copies will be maintained. At this time, interviews will be recorded over with ambient noise twice to ensure their deletion. Transcripts will also be stored until August 31, 2015, in a separate locked filing cabinet in the researcher’s home. No electronic copies will be maintained. All physical copies will be shredded on this date.

Data Analysis and Dissemination

Data from interview transcripts and follow-up questionnaires will be examined in this study. Questionnaires will be used for descriptive information about participants, and open-ended questions will be examined for emergent themes. Transcripts will be qualitatively analyzed for emergent themes. Thematic analysis will be carried out with NVivo Qualitative Analysis software.

Data are being collected for use in the principal investigator’s Master’s thesis in the School of Criminology. Once completed, the results of this study will likely be presented at a criminological/social science conference. If interested, participants may request the results of this study from the principal investigator or faculty supervisor. Contact information for both individuals will be provided to all participants.
Risk Designation

This project is designated minimal risk. While participants may experience minimal psychological discomfort recalling sensitive memories, the magnitude of this harm is unlikely to be any greater than that experienced by participants in their everyday lives. The questions posed are not intended to cause any emotional or physical distress, and are designed to uncover experiences with and views of homophobia and transphobia in online settings. If participants experience any discomfort as a result of their participation they will be provided with counselling contact information (both at educational institutions and other agencies in the Lower Mainland). Risks to the researcher and third parties are nil.
Appendix C

Recruitment Poster

Volunteers Needed for Study on Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying in Online Environments

Are you …
A gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning (GLBTQQ) individual who feels that you were cyberbullied because of your sexual orientation or gender identity?
-or-
A heterosexual individual who feels that you were cyberbullied because of a perceived sexual orientation or gender identity?

19 years of age or older?

Currently enrolled at a post-secondary institution in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia?

Interested in discussing your experiences (both positive and negative) in an in-depth interview?

If you answered yes to all of these questions, you are invited to participate in an exploratory research study investigating post-secondary students’ experiences with homophobia and transphobia in online environments. This confidential research is being conducted by a graduate student in the School of Criminology at SFU with hopes of gaining a clearer understanding of homophobia and transphobia in cyberspace and to raise awareness about its occurrence.

For more information, or to volunteer, please contact Aynsley at [study-specific email address]
Appendix D

Interview Guide

Interviews will be semi-structured and guided by participants’ answers and interests. Questions may not be asked in the order of this interview schedule, and additional questions may be asked that are not included in the schedule depending on participant responses.

Introduction
Introduce self, purpose of study
Explain confidentiality- right to non-answer and to end the interview at any time
Recording- get consent to record. If uncomfortable, take detailed notes

Internet Use
How often do you typically spend on the Internet in a given day? Week?
Do you use the Internet more or less often since leaving secondary school? Why or why not?
What are some of your preferred ways to spend time on the Internet?
What sites or venues do you visit most often?
On which sites/venues do you spend the majority of your time?
What types of activities do you like to engage in online?
How important is Internet use and access to you? Why?
What are some of the most advantageous aspects of the Internet?
What are some of the most negative aspects of the Internet?
Do you engage in socialization in online environments? If so, what types? What venues?
Do you prefer online or real-life socialization? A combination? Why?
What are some advantages of online socialization?
What are some disadvantages of online socialization?

In-person Bullying
Have you had experiences with in-person bullying in middle or high school? If so, what were these experiences like? Where did they occur?
What do you think these experiences were motivated by, if anything? Why?
How did you respond to these experiences?
How did you feel following these experiences?
Have you had experiences with in-person bullying since secondary school? If so, what were these experiences like? Where did they occur?
What do you think these experiences were motivated by, if anything? Why?
How did you respond to these experiences?
How did you feel following these experiences?

Online Bullying
Have you had experiences with online forms of bullying in middle or high school? If so, what were these experiences like? Where did they occur?
Was the bully/victim known to you? If so, how?
What do you think these experiences were motivated by, if anything? Why?
How did you respond to these experiences?
How did you feel following these experiences?
If you have also experienced in-person bullying, how did these experiences differ from those experiences?

Have you had experiences with online forms of bullying since secondary school? If so, what were these experiences like? Where did they occur?
Was the bully/victim known to you? If so, how?
What do you think these experiences were motivated by, if anything? Why?
How did you respond to these experiences?
How did you feel following these experiences?
If you have also experienced in-person bullying, how did these experiences differ from those experiences?
Appendix E

Interview Follow-Up Questionnaire

Please note: you are not required to answer any of these questions. If you do not feel comfortable providing a response, simply leave the space blank.

Would you like to select your own pseudonym to replace your name in this study? If so, please indicate the pseudonym of choice. If not, one will be selected for you by the researcher.

How would you like to be referred to throughout the study (he, she, they, he/she, she/he, by pseudonym only, or otherwise)?

Do you identify with any sexual identity or orientation? If so, what term do you use to describe your sexual identity or orientation?

Do you identify with any gender identity? If so, what term do you prefer to describe your gender?

What term would you use to describe your racial, cultural, or ethnic background?
How long have you been out of high school (if possible, provide the year of graduation)?

What is your current student status (e.g. full-time, part-time)?

In addition to being a student, do you work or volunteer? Please indicate which (if any), and whether you do so on a part-time, full-time, or temporary basis.

Is there anything that you would like to add that you did not get the chance to discuss during the interview? (Feel free to also write on the back of the questionnaire if the space provided is not sufficient)

Thank you for your participation
Appendix F

Lower Mainland Counselling Contacts

General Crisis Counselling
Vancouver (24 hrs)
(604) 872-3311

Fraser Health (24 hrs)
(604) 951-8855

Mental Health Emergency Services
1-877-384-8062

British Columbia Institute of Technology
SE16-128
(604) 432-8608

Capilano University
Birch Building (room 267)
(604) 984-1744

Douglas College
David Lam Campus Counselling Services
1250 Pinetree Way- A 1050
(604) 777-6185

New Westminster Campus Counselling Services
700 Royal Avenue- 4600
(604) 527-5486

Kwantlen Polytechnic University
Cloverdale Campus Counselling
5500 180th St- 1120
(604) 598-6044
Langley Campus Counselling
20901 Langley By-Pass- 1050
(604) 599-3213

Richmond Campus Counselling
8771 Lansdowne Rd- 1640
(604) 599-2600

Surrey Campus Counselling
12666 72 Ave- 160
(604) 599-2044

Langara College
(604) 323-5221

Simon Fraser University
SFU Counselling Services
Burnaby (MBC 0101) (778) 782- 4615
Surrey & Vancouver (778) 782-5000
intake@sfu.ca

SFU Nightline
(430 pm-9 am)
(604) 857-7148

University of the Fraser Valley
Abbotsford (B214)
(604) 854-4528

Chilliwack (CEP Building- A-1318)
(604) 795-2808

Vancouver Community College
(604) 871-7204
Broadway Campus (4022)

Downtown Campus (103)