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Perceptions Surrounding Cyberbullying and Self-Disclosure Among the LGBTQ Community: A Qualitative Approach

Alec Martin
Ursinus College, almartin@ursinus.edu

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Qualitative Approach

By: Alec Martin

Mentor: Dr. Lynne Edwards

Abstract

LGBTQ adolescents, like all youth, face challenges: the push for high academic marks, the desire for positive relationships, and the right to be themselves in a safe environment. Unfortunately, LGBTQ youths are far more likely than their heterosexual peers to experience bullying and cyberbullying. According to a 2005 study by the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network, the second largest cause of bullying was actual or presumed sexual orientation or identity. Gay males were more than twice as likely to be bullied on school property than their heterosexual peers, 43.1% and 18.3%, respectively (Olsen et al, 2014). In addition, 23.1% of bisexual adolescents were found to have been threatened or injured with a weapon on school property, compared to 7.8% of their heterosexual peers (Mueller, et al., 2015). This stark difference represents a problem that this study sought to address. Using focus group methodology, 13 self-identified LGBTQ youths aged 10 – 19 years old were interviewed about their perceptions of cyberbullying and self-disclosure. Preliminary analysis suggests that these youths share common perceptions of cyberbullying, but they differ in their experiences with direct and indirect effects of cyberbullying. Additionally, these youths are particularly savvy about the complexities involved in managing their privacy and identities online and offline.

Introduction

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) adolescents face challenges that are on top of the push for high academic marks. According to BullyingStatistics.org, one out of every four youths in the U.S. are bullied on a regular basis. LGBTQ youths, however, are far more likely to experience bullying, as compared to their white heterosexual peers. Previous research found that White gay males and lesbian females were 3.918 and 2.976 times more likely to experience being bullied as compared to their White heterosexual peers. In addition, White lesbian females were 2.976 times more likely, and Hispanic bisexual males were 2.631 times more likely to experience being bullied (Mueller et al., 2015). These findings illustrate that there is a problem, but do not investigate why or how bullying is perceived among adolescents.

Cyberbullying poses a unique threat to adolescents in that it follows them anywhere there is technology, like their homes. Unfortunately for adolescents, the outlets for bullying have been recorded to include, but are not limited to, verbal name-calling about presumed or actual sexual

orientation (Evans et al., 2014), violent threats both in person and on the Internet (Mueller et al., 2015), physical attacks with or without weapons (Olsen et al., 2014), and a barrage of hateful comments online (Sadowski et al., 2013). Gay males (43.1%) were over twice as likely to be bullied on school property when compared to their heterosexual (18.3%) peers (Olsen et al., 2014). In addition, 23.1% of bisexual adolescents were found to have been threatened or injured with a weapon on school property, compared to 7.8% of their heterosexual peers. This stark difference is not just a passing phase that is "adolescence," cyberbullying has lasting effects, such as suicide attempts (Blumfeld et al., 2010).

This research found participants saying that victims in the LGBTQ community, and as a whole, need help from more than just their peers, they need support groups, and family acceptance. In fact, studies have already begun to ask questions surrounding "suicide ideation" among LGBTQ adolescents, yet due to the standardization of collecting survey data, fall short in conveying the personal experiences of these individuals (Cenat et al., 2015). According to Cenat et al., 1.22% of bisexual females responded positively to suicidal ideation as compared to .44% of their heterosexual female peers. Previous research also shows that there are effects of cyberbullying that spread beyond the primary encounter. While only 1.7% of heterosexual adolescents reported having experienced homophobic bullying, a staggering 29.4% of gay and lesbian participants reported being bullied with the use of homophobic remarks. Other research that focuses on mental health issues associated with bullying, found that compared to their heterosexual female peers (66.1%), lesbian (76.7%) and bisexual (85.4%) female adolescents responded 'yes' to psychological distress because of cyberbullying (Cenat et al., 2015). In addition to Cenat, Mueller specifically studied the link between cyberbullying and suicide ideation, and found that White bisexual participants were over four times more likely to contemplate suicide ideation as compared to their White heterosexual peers.

The common thread throughout these findings is the use of survey data and the quantitative approach by most of the research listed (Evans et al., 2014, Mueller et al., 2015, Olsen et al., 2014, Cenat et al., 2015). While they all provided necessary background knowledge and data for future research, society cannot fully address this problem until qualitative data details the personal accounts and experiences of these people. This study aims to help bridge the gap between the quantitative survey-driven data and the personal experiences people in the LGBTQ community have gone through. In writing a book about LGBTQ adolescents, Michael

Sadowski uses a narrative approach to communicate the daily tortures and recurrences these children face. This approach lead Sadowski to an array of areas surrounding LGBTQ bullying for which the reader and society can address. Sadowski found that changing the culture of bullying can only be achieved if peers, school administrations, and families all together push for a change (Sadowski et al., 2013).

The purpose of this research is to study LGBTQ adolescents and their perceptions surrounding cyberbullying, self-disclosure, and personal information. In order to do this, a qualitative research approach was undertaken, focusing on the experiences of participants. Previous research suggested that these students would all have similar ideas of what cyberbullying is, and who is affected. Previous research also shows that based on their sexual orientation, these focus group participants should report a large amount of sexual orientation-based cyberbullying. Because of the presumed increased exposure, it is also expected that these individuals will be wary about how much personal information they share on the Internet.

Method

To explore these theories, the researcher analyzed the speech of these participants individually and against the whole group. This process, which is detailed in a book written by Corbin and Strauss, is called comparative analysis. It will help develop themes and patterns surrounding the effects, both short- and long-term, on this community, and how the prevalence of cyberbullying inturn affects their perceptions of what cyberbullying is and when it is coming in contact with these students. Lastly, an aim is to stimulate future focus group and qualitative data research of the LGBTQ community to fill the gaps that quantitative survey approaches leave.

Subjects and Settings

Participants were 6 youths who were clients from a private counselling center in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. Forty-eight primary school students and thirty-two high school students participated in the study. Among the six center participants, two were female,

two identified as male, one identified as demiboy, and one only provided his name as his gender. Participants' ages ranged from 15 years old to 19 years old.

Sexual orientation – The group (n=6) consisted of adolescents who identified as non-heterosexual. Two identified as bisexual, one youth identified as gay, one panromantic demisexual, one panromantic gyresexual, and one youth as trans ftm.

Counseling center participants were offered pizza and gift cards for their participation. Both counseling center focus group sessions were undertaken on separate days in a common room with an area for eating pizza (the arts and crafts space) and a discussion section with couches and lounge chairs. There was an observation window with a curtain that was closed to ensure privacy. The PIs and center staff were in separate rooms outside / away from the focus groups.

Materials

A standard focus group format was employed, comprised of 15 open-ended questions centering around perceptions of cyberbullying and self-disclosure. To ascertain participants' definition of cyberbullying, 4 scenarios were included for participants' assessment.

The questions solicited participant's views pertaining to knowledge about cyberbullying, self-disclosure, and its connection to bullying behaviors. In all of the focus group sessions, participants were audiotaped using two Olympus VN-7200 recorders which were set approximately two feet apart on a table in front of the facilitators who were at either end of the table. Students were informed when the recorders began operating.

Procedure

Parental consent was obtained before conducting the sessions at the counseling center because participants were minors and required additional justice. Participants also filled in assent forms to signify their willingness to participate. No parental consent forms were sought from the college students; however, they did complete assent forms.

The furniture arrangement at the counseling center was identical for both focus groups. Six or eight chairs were placed in a circle around a coffee table. Recorders were placed centrally on the desk, with the moderators sitting at each end of the table; moderators each controlled one recorder.

Participants were brought by a counselor to the room where they were met by the moderators and PIs who introduced themselves and explained what the study was about. After the PIs and counselors left, the moderator asked what pronouns the participants prefer. The participants were asked a general question about cyberbullying. On obtaining several responses, the moderator asked additional questions until all relevant views had been expressed. The moderator then moved to the next question. If the children digressed from the question, they were allowed to continue for a time before the moderator guided them back to the original point. On average, each focus group session lasted from 45 minutes to an hour.

Transcription

The Olympus VN-7200 was given to a student intern for the transcription process. Over the course of 2 weeks, the fifty minute focus group audio recording was transcribed to a Google Docs word document. The preliminary task was to simply to plug in headphones and listen and copy exactly what was asked and said from the recording. This first stage involved transcribing the words said, rather than by whom and in what manner. This process was completed over the course of 9 days.

Once all the words were dictated to the word document, the next step was to determine the way the speech was uttered and by whom. In order to code for types of speech pattern and who exactly was talking, the transcriber followed the style guidelines laid out by West & Zimmerman in their study *Interruptions in Cross-Sex Conversations*. In addition to those, it was necessary to highlight and distinguish between different participants' additions, so a color-coding method was created. In addition to this, the transcriber was given a list of demographics of the participants which included names, age, year, race, nationality, gender, orientation, and comments. Only the first names were included in order to keep the identities of the participants concealed.

The final process in the transcription required reviewing the final script with the recording device to ensure there were no mistakes, and that the proper Transcribing Conventions were used throughout. Once the transcript was finalized, the analysis and coding process began.

Analysis and Coding Process

During this stage, the researcher followed the guidelines put forth by Corbin and Strauss in their book titled *Basics of Qualitative Research*. The guidelines required the researcher to go through the transcription and pull out any section that may be a possible theme. At this point, the research wrote a few sentences about why it was important, and the important words or phrases used. Once the whole transcription was gone through once, the researcher could then go back and identify the themes that emerged from the notes. In addition, a grounded theory approach was necessary to keep in mind to add themes that emerge after the preliminary themes.

Once the researcher went through the data all together, it was then necessary to employ a comparative analysis on the individuals as well as the group. Following the guidelines, this entails going back and looking at what, when, and how individuals added to the focus group (Corbin et al., 2008). Also, this requires comparing what they say to the group consensus. It became immediately apparent that this process was going to be necessary because of the personal experiences many of these adolescents have gone through.

Results

In the analysis of the focus group of LGBTQ identified adolescents, the researcher found four main themes surrounding cyberbullying and self-disclosure among these participants. The categories that arose from the data were perceptions surrounding cyberbullying, activity abandonment, active self-disclosure management, and permissible cyberbullying. Participants' perceptions surrounding cyberbullying developed into five sub-categories labeled concepts, psychological distress, social repercussions, physical effects, and specific observations. Developing these categories was paramount in understanding how qualitative data fits alongside existing quantitative studies.

Perceptions Surrounding Cyberbullying

While participants shared similar views on the definition of cyberbullying, not all participants were aware of some of specific types of cyberbullying discussed. Using words like 'shaming' and 'harassment,' participants added their own definition of cyberbullying, similar to Ethan's; *[i]t's bullying either over like texting, or like harassments or threats via the Internet, or over mobile devices*. Multiple participants added different outlets for cyberbullying, like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, fan-fiction communities, as well as being as vague as, "the

Internet, or over mobile devices." Participants agreed that it was 'intentional' use of these words to hurt another 'human being(s)' and other 'people.' In addition, descriptions included the aggressor as a 'fifty year-old' 'pervert' when talking about a specific hypothetical example, as opposed to victims who often were described as 'human being(s),' 'you,' or 'people' 'you'd personally probably see.' When discussing cyberbullying on the whole, participants categorized bullying as 'shaming' and 'harassment' that's 'emotionally, or even physically.' When asked about cyberbullying as a concept, it was often referred to as a 'threat,' and even specific examples of 'rape threats and death threats' were added. While only Brady stated that he had been a victim of cyberbullying, all participants had similar perceptions of the players involved, and added different ways they saw or heard about cyberbullying.

Additionally, when the moderator asked the group to give percentages of adolescents that were cyberbullied every week, only one participant gave a percentage (Ellie: 60%) higher than the statistic the moderator later provided (50%). Although all the participants gave a lower percentage, and only one said he was directly a victim, participants still viewed cyberbullying as a problem on the Internet. Brady responded to the moderator's statistic with, "[a]nd that just kinda like reiterates that like if half of the people in the world are being cyberbullied (x) like what - does that say about society." He later added, and participants agreed that, "all of us here have had at least 1 experience with it too. Or if we haven't then we know someone who has."

Psychological Distress

Participants conveyed how in their perception of cyberbullying left the victim in a state of emotional and psychological distress, that was sometimes closely tied to a physical threat. The participants' perceptions of these effects were derived from threatening, 'harassing,' and 'shaming' victims. Participants stressed that this was not only confined to 'Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram,' and that sending threats and spamming the victim with hateful comments were two of the ways they saw cyberbullying happening. These two participants perceived that cyberbullying was correlated with adolescent suicides.

Ethan: It's (x) It's definitely a prevalent problem, especially when um, because of bullying and things like this that you find uh (#) like say 1 teen commits suicide, and you go on their online and profiles and things, and find that people have been harass::ing them 'nd sending death

threats, and telling them they should be doing these things to themselves like hurting themselves. (#) It's definitely a problem that needs to be addressed 'nd fixed as best it can=

Jiah:= Yeah there 'z been an increase in teen suicides I think that cyberbullying is part of that problem."

Physical Effect

Another perception of cyberbullying that emerged was physical threats and attacks. Simply drawing a line between cyberbullying, which is defined by bullying through a cyber place, and therefore not in person, and a physical threat was an important trend to note. While one participant, Alica, says that sometimes threats and cyberbullying can be simply ignored online, she did address a form of cyberbullying called doxing where a cyberbully will publicly display a victim's address. It was important to note that no participants asked for clarification of what doxing was.

Alica: I said it on um doxing before. To me, that's like the (x) that's actually the really like the worst thing you pretty much can do? 'Cuz um, then it kinda opens the door for like (x) other people that actually legitimately threaten you, because they actually know where you are now. Otherwise, usually it's just, baseless threats. So it can be sometimes ignored, sometimes not.

An often safe space like one's home, can now be a source of physical threats and violence due to doxing. Cyberbullying to these participants, is perceived as having some of the results that in-person bullying. Not only does this participant show how it can lead to legitimate threats, but example like this creates a very real association between cyberbullying and physical danger.

Social Repercussions

Although participants made it clear that, "cyber bullying doesn't just happen on social media, it happens on other websites and can happen on any website, or any like gaming community, or anything," the social ramifications of cyber bullying was a topic that participants focused on. Participants mentioned spreading misinformation, bullying a relationship, and catfishing, all which affect a social interaction. One specific fear that was mentioned but was not

elaborated specifically on was, *"the spreading of misinformation about another person on the Internet."*

Not all participants knew right away what "Catfishing" was, but when it was described, it was referenced later in the group. One participant's description was, "catfishing is when you pretend to be another human being through the Internet, or through a dating app, or anything like that. And you act like you really like this person, and you like (x) form a relationship with this person with no intention of ever meeting the person." Participants were aware of the fact that identities could be concealed or altered online, with one description of catfishing as, "the skinniest, like (x) like most attractive girl on the planet, but I could be like this fat, overweight pervert." More than one aggressor was also seen to be an issue in this category when a participant described demonizing a relationship online.

this younger girl was dating a guy that was older than her by like 2 years in the gaming community but she was like seventeen and he was nineteen. And everyone threw a huge fit, 'nd started callin the guy a "pedo" and the girl a "slut".

In this scenario, more than one aggressor was able to 'gang up' on the couple online. The participant previously stated that this was a 'personal experience' where this happened to one of his friends. Although cyberbullying, by definition, requires technology, the effects can be real-life relationships.

Specific Observations

Lastly, the group touched on some of the specific times they have witnessed, or hear about cyberbullying. When talking about this, one participant brought up how women in fanfiction communities are often bullied, sometimes even to the point of doxing. As described by a participant, these 'women game reviewers' were 'violently harassed' through 'rape threats and death threats' just for 'speaking out, or having opinions.' A dialogue between two participants illustrated more on this topic,

Brady: I know a lot of times women gamer - like women in the gaming community also not get taken seriously? because they don't (x) gaming is like, primarily a male thing, it's like dominated by men. And=

Ethan: =You're like a fake gamer chick, like=

Brady: =And, there are some girls who very much do (x) go try and be that fake gamer girl, but there are other girls that are legit gamers, and like do these things, but they get like harassed and made fun of and everything because, they're like well you're not a rea - you can't be a real gamer, you're a girl

Participants were able to identify with the women gamers in these scenarios, possibly because these participants stated that they at least, "know someone who has" been affected by cyberbullying. Specifically, the participant who is talking about the real vs. 'fake gamer chick' identified previously that he was a victim of cyberbullying.

Permissible Cyberbullying

Along with their construction of the players in bullying, an interesting theme came up when the participants began to answer questions about whether there was ever a place for cyberbullying. On the whole, there was not much consensus. One participant, who had not shared with the group that he had been a direct victim of cyberbullying said, "I don't see no (x) nothing wrong with harassing Nazi's on the Internet." This participant followed up his comment with a hesitant chuckle, and was met with confusion by most of the group. Another participant, who previously identified as a male said, "Um, just from someone who's like kinda believe that everyone's right to have their own opinion and everything, no matter what that is (#). I don't generally think that's ever really right." While both of these participants did not say that they had been the victim of a cyberbullying attack, it was very interesting to note that any of these targeted individuals found a reason for bullying at all.

After detailing different scenarios and examples of cyberbullying, again a consensus among the group arose when talking about specific instances where cyberbullying was tolerated. It was not recorded that these participants said they wanted others to start cyberbullying these people, what as seen is that these instances where, by definition, cyberbullying would occur, they simply did not view it as such.

Aidan:=Well I mean there are people who are sexual predators (x) and like you ne::ed to tell people about that. Like you <u>need</u> to tell their workplace and people that they're around.
Ethan: I think that's more reporting an issue rather than cyberbullying though.
Brady: Yeah, that's just reporting something like (x) like that would be like in a doctor patient confidentiality thing where like it's an alarming thing that like by law you have to say something.
Ethan: Yeah -
Jiah: It leads into another kind of cyberbullying fr::om the (x) just the doxing the horrible people, but it bleeds into going to other people who are just normal people

It is important to mention the specific words and phrases used to describe individuals who they do not see as being a victim. Going out of one's way to alert the boss of a 'sexual predator' is not considered bullying at all. Instead, it is viewed as a civil service, something that is 'by law,' and that 'you have to say something.' The use of the pronoun 'you' may not have been a conscious choice, but is a signal that this participant, and others, view harassment and doxing in a different light depending on the subject. It was also important to see that these participants did not define cyberbullying in the same way when it came to friendships.

Brady:=I think the main point is like if both parties agree that like "Yeah, she can call me a bitch!?" (x) That's fine then, ya'know? 'Cuz then it's like, well - she's not doing it, n - it's not harming me, so it's ok' because I'm ok with it and she's ok with it.

Alcia: I kinda once had an experience like that in a chat. And basically we just randomly said -, everyone just starts randomly (words) "shut the fuck up". Like we were all saying it capital, so that's like, basically, sarcasm or joking, so basically we were all just messing with each other.

In both of the quotations, cyberbullying by definition is occurring. Yet, both participants justify the bullying because the rules are different when it comes to friends. This is a finding that was agreed upon by the group of participants.

Activity Abandonment

Beyond inciting an immediate response or threat between victim and bully, possibly unintended results of cyberbullying played a huge role in lives of these participants. One result of cyberbullying was activity abandonment or hesitation to begin an activity all together. One participant gave a detailed account of why exactly he decided against sharing his activity on YouTube,

Ethan: No 'cause um, uhh uhh, originally I wanted to do some stuff on YouTube and things like that, but I have seen (x) uhh:: (x) something that makes me hesitant about actually doing it. Um I'm an equestrian, I ride horses and everything like that, and there's a lot of people who will search out videos just to shame you on your equitation. Just to shame you on how you ride your horse, and what you do with your horse. And it's not so much that, (1) I just need to think that everything that you're doing is wrong. Like no matter how you take a jump, no matter how you go around the poles, ((softly)) or down. You are wrong. No matter what you say to try to defend yourself, they find a way to tell you that what you are doing is:: wrong, and you're hurting your animal.

To the participant, the hesitation he was feeling was a result of witnessing cyberbullying personally. This post shows how defenseless and overwhelmed some cyberbully victims can feel. "No matter what you say to try to defend yourself, they find a way to tell you that what you are doing is wrong." A schoolyard bully can shout out names and pick fights, they can even make fun of adolescents for what they do out of school, but cyberbullying has pushed those boundaries from in person and in school, to following the victim to their home, to their favorite activity, to their own identities. And participants were recorded to feel the effects…

Brady: … like fan fiction writing communities, and I had been personal victim on a fan fiction community, where it made me quit writing for 2 years. Because the person had <u>literally</u> went through, on every single one of my stories and posted <u>some</u> sort of really rude comment about how I was a shitty writer, and how I should go kill myself.

Here, not only does this participant illustrate one of the only actual personal experiences detailed in this data. The result of this cyberbullying was Brady quit writing for two years. In

addition, the participant later details how cyberbullying can have a more widespread effect when compared to in-person bullying. Cyberbullies have access to all of a person's public information online, which is often more than what is available in person.

<u>Active Disclosure Management</u>

The final stretch of questions the focus group was centered around personal information and self-disclosure, and inevitably their relationship with cyberbullying. Data showed a separation between the types of personal information shared on- and offline. Like with the cyberbullying definition, again there was agreement among the group that adolescents must be careful with whom they chose to share with, and how much to share online. No participants said that they were the target of homophobic or sexual orientation-based cyberbullying online. A possible explanation for this is that participants go to great lengths to conceal their identities online.

Ellie: Um, jus' like the more information they have on you the more ammunition they have. So if you're like "Oh you're a (x) gay, fuck you! you know for being gay." But it's kinda like (x) like if you (x) if you have no information like none at all, and there's no pictures of you, and there's no information on you, jus' like your name your age. No one can make fun of you for that=

Brady: I think also that like there could also be like (x) in the (words) or someone could start cyberbullying you because of some of the personal information you share. Because there are people out there that like are homophobic and stuff and if you say, "Hey look I'm gay!" They could become a completely different person around you and start cyberbullying because, "Oh I don't like you because you're gay, you're the scurge on the Earth or somethin' like that."

In this focus group, participants only spoke about homophobic cyberbullying when the moderator directly asked about it. In the first quote, the participant directly relates information to 'ammunition' in the eyes of the aggressor. Later, the word 'ammunition' was used again when a participant said, "defining yourself sexually can like (x) give so much ammunition to people that are really out there to hurt you, and that's a very personal thing to be sharing." The use of the word 'ammunition' is an indicator of how wary participants are to share personal information

online. In the second quote, the participant explains how his perception is that people can be a, "completely different person...and start cyberbullying" you. Here, even someone who the speaker thought her knew can change online, and reinforces their lack of disclosure online. When the moderator phrased a scenario about someone telling a friend in person that he was gay, the participants agreed that sharing this would be okay as long as they know how close friends the two are. But, when sharing this online, not only was a large consensus to not share anything online that they did not want in public, but they also presented savvy ways to conceal their identities online.

One participant even runs a 'server' through a computer in her house. This participant knew that this was the only way online that she was sharing her identity, or computer's IP address, and therefore her location. While it was unclear what this server was, the same participant said that she "generally [doesn't] just give my real name for anything so nothing would generally come up for me." These finding do not mean that these participants were not being bullied based on their sexuality, rather than they have adapted ways to manage self-disclosure online.

Participants not only shied away from sharing this information online, but also showed that they are adept at finding ways around sharing information publicly on the Internet. One of the most startling pieces of data was about the lack of self-disclosure online when a participant said, "Alicia: Like I don't tell anybody on the Internet that um (x) that um (x) like I used to be a guy((softly)) or anything I don't talk about that ever." This information help shed light as to why these participants did not mention being personally cyberbullied because of their sexual identity. When the participants discussed more about how they try and share personal information online, a more rounded picture began to arise. This participant was responding to or not it was good to share personal information online.

Jiah:=Okay, um there's also this weird thing of where it depends on who you're talking to like say there's this person you Skype with every single day like face-to-face Skyping and you know they're not using some kind of uh visual filter on the camera or anything like that. It's someone

you can probably generally trust (x) uh to know some personal information, probably not all of it.

This data shows that these participants are going to extreme lengths just to feel secure with their friends on the Internet. Even when using video chat, this participant specifically mentions a 'visual filter' as a possible way someone could conceal their identity online. Many heterosexual adolescents, who do not have to worry about their personal information becoming public online, may never even think about setting up something as complex as hacking into Skype, and using a visual filter on their camera. Even still, this participant added at the end that they would 'probably not [share] all of it.' This type of face-to-face video chat is a way around publically talking about their sexuality, and may shed light on why these participants did not have the same amount of personal sexuality and gender based cyberbullying.

In comparison, online, these scenarios were disputed. When asked directly about what they felt personal information is and what they should share online, participants used words like 'address,' 'place of work,' and specific locations. Yes, participants focused conversation on whether they should use actual first and last names, but even there certain characteristics of their identity were recorded for analysis. But overarchingly, the topic of personal information online was focused on location. There was even one participant who said specifically, "y*ea like what he said with location like I don't even give out me sta::te. Like I'm like (x) n-n-no I live in Californ ia.*" For members of the LGBTQ community, one would presume that personal information, in any setting, would have to do with their gender and sexual identity, but online it is clear that these participants, regardless of whether they stated they had a personal experience with cyberbullying or not, shy away from revealing this type of personal information.

Discussion

This focus group's perceptions of cyberbullying are informed by their observations and experiences, but also rumors and conjecture among their peers. Although not everything that these participants said was based in fact, their perceptions of what cyberbullying is, where it occurs and the players involved were consistent with previous research (Blumfeld et al., 2010, Cenat et al., 2015, Evans et al., 2014). In addition, participants' commonly perceived

psychological, social, and physical effects of cyberbullying were consistent with the literature about bullying and mental health outcomes (Cenat et al., 2015, Evans et al., 2014, Mueller et al., 2015, Olsen et al., 2014).

Although participants' perceptions of cyberbullying and its effects are consistent with previous, survey-based research, the personal effects experienced by participants who witnessed cyberbullying are not. One result of witnessing cyberbullying online was activity abandonment or hesitation by study participants, a result not observed in previous quantitative studies. The personal accounts of activity abandonment, as well as the lack of data on homophobic and sexual orientation based cyberbullying help show how these adolescents are actively managing their self-disclosure online. Findings showed that these participants are very particular about with whom and in what way they share personal information online. These findings suggest that participants manage their self-disclosure online as a way to avoid being targeted for homophobic or sexual orientation based cyberbullying. Where previous research found that sexual minorities were the largest target for bullying (Cenat et al., 2015, Mueller et al., 2015, Olsen et al., 2014), this focus group provided evidence for how these adolescents are avoiding being a part of the victim's group.

Another finding that was not seen in any previous research was the discussion of permissible cyberbullying. Specifically, where previous research results found that the lesbian, gay, and bisexual participants in their study were among the most likely to experiences instances of cyberbullying, the current research found evidence of permissible cyberbullying, the identification of "acceptable" victims or targets. These new findings not only demonstrate how more qualitative approaches are necessary, but also that these participants can excuse cyberbullying in particular instances. This sentiment was not echoed in other research, with data showing the necessity for support groups, like the GSA (Blumfeld et al., 2010, Olsen et al., 2014).

Conclusion

Overall, there was a consensus among the participants surrounding their perceptions of what cyberbullying is, the players involved, and the effects associated. Although there were only

two personal accounts of cyberbullying, actual effects were recorded. These effects included activity abandonment, active self-disclosure management, and finally permissible cyberbullying.

Limitations and Future Research

One aspect of this research that was limited was the time. The transcription of the focus group and this research was completed by a summer intern in two months, which lead the researcher to possibly miss some information that may have been realized after an extended period of time. Another limitation was that the focus group data was previously recorded, so there was no way to get more information from the individuals. Had the researcher conducted the focus group, probing, and clarifying questions could be posed to further illuminate a topic. Future research on this topic could help provide insight into how individuals experience the statistics of cyberbullying.

Acknowledgements

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