

THE GAMER'S MINDSET: A RETROSPECTIVE STUDY EXPLORING YOUNG ADULT

MALES' ONLINE GAMING EXPERIENCES

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Abstract

This study investigated the in-depth experiences of young adult males describing their adolescent online gaming behaviours. Qualitative data was collected from three interviews and five focus groups, with a total of 19 participants ranging in age from 18 to 26. Braun and Clark's (2006) thematic analysis was used to analyze the transcribed data. Six themes emerged: (1) Reasons for gaming; (2) Understanding gaming culture; (3) The role friendships play in online gaming; (4) The role trash-talking plays in online gaming; (5) Understanding cyberbullying in the context of gaming; and (6) Barriers to not reporting. Participants reported that the concept of gaming culture is too broad an area and that researchers should examine the sub-cultures of games (such as genres) to gain a better understanding of gaming culture. Participants also discussed how online gaming helped form and maintain friendships. Participants revealed that trash-talking, the use of name calling and disparaging, taunting and boastful comments, while perhaps appearing hostile to others, was considered banter and a way of joking around and connecting with friends. Trash-talking was mostly done with friends and rarely done with strangers. Participants regularly trash-talked in certain genres (i.e., first person shooters, sports games, or battle arenas) as well as in certain games (i.e., Call of Duty, Madden, or League of Legends). They considered trash-talking as being normal, and did not consider these behaviours to be cyberbullying. Participants believed that cyberbullying happens in gaming, but rarely. In the gaming community it may be that gamers have their own set of norms that distinguish their behaviour from the common understanding of cyberbullying. Future research should begin investigating specific sub-cultures of gaming as well as examining how cyberbullying does or does not occur in online gaming.

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Dedication

To all my family and friends, thank you for all your time, support, guidance and patience throughout this journey. I can't name everyone in this short message, but there are a few I would like to specifically mention. To my brother, Ira and my sister-in-law Ashley, thank you. I could not have asked for a better brother and sister-in-law. To my aunts Judy and Clo, I couldn't have done this without you in my corner. To my dad, Mark, thank you for all the support you have provided me over the years.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the last two decades cyberbullying has peaked the interest of researchers, practitioners, teachers, principals, other school personnel, parents, and the general public.

Cyberbullying has often been defined as:

...any behavior performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicates hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others. Additionally, in cyberbullying experiences the identity of the bully may or may not be known. Cyberbullying can occur through electronically mediated communication at school; however cyberbullying behaviors commonly occur outside of school as well. (Tokunaga, 2010, p. 278)

The interest in cyberbullying is due to the academic, social, emotional, and psychological impact cyberbullying can have on many of its victims, who are primarily adolescents and young adults (Andrie, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008; Li, 2005; 2006; Pisch, 2010; Rivituso, 2012). Unfortunately, young people have reported experiencing bouts of depression, anxiety, and social ostracism as a result of cyberbullying (Cénat et al., 2014). Furthermore, cyberbullying is believed to be a contributing factor in some suicide attempts and successful suicides (Kowalski et al., 2008). One such example that gained international attention was the story of Amanda Todd, a 15-year-old girl from Port Coquitlam, British Columbia who committed suicide in 2012 after being sexually harassed online and cyberbullied by peers. Days before her tragic death she posted a video on YouTube that revealed her experiences (Dean, 2012).

Both researchers and the general public have had difficulty over the years agreeing upon the specific criteria involved in cyberbullying which has led to difficulties in defining

cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2008; Law, Shapka, Hymel, Olson, & Waterhouse, 2011; Tokunaga, 2010). Two of the questions at the heart of the debate include: (1) What is considered an electronic medium? and (2) Does an electronic medium include text messages, social media sites (i.e., Facebook, Twitter or chat rooms), as well as online gaming consoles (i.e., Playstation, Xbox, or Personal Computer) (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2008; Tokanuga, 2010)? Issues of intent (i.e., does the perpetrator, and more importantly, the victim view an act as cyberbullying), anonymity (i.e., does familiarity impact the experiences of cyberbullying), power imbalances (i.e., do relationships between victim and perpetrator impact cyberbullying), and repetition (i.e., does frequency influence cyberbullying) have also come into question in defining cyberbullying with different parties setting different parameters (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2008; Tokanuga, 2010). Despite this ongoing debate, there are frequently cited definitions of the term cyberbullying (e.g., Aftab, 2006; Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Law, Shapka, Hymel et al., 2011; Konig, Gollwitzer, & Steffgen, 2010; Kowalski et al., 2008; Kowalski, Giumetti, Schoreder, & Lattanner, 2014; Li, 2008; Menesini et al., 2013; Slonje & Smith, 2008). For the purposes of this study, Tokunaga's (2010) definition of cyberbullying cited above was used.

Research on cyberbullying has examined various components including prevalence rates, methods of cyberbullying, gender differences, and the impact cyberbullying has on the psychological, emotional, social, and academic well-being of adolescents (Kowalski et al., 2008; Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Li, 2005; Pisch, 2010; Tokunaga, 2010). Depending on the definition, measures, and methodology for studying cyberbullying, prevalence rates range between 2.3%-72% (Ballard & Welch, 2017; Holfeld & Leadbeater, 2015; Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2014; McInroy & Mishna, 2014; Tokunaga, 2010). Traditionally most

research on cyberbullying uses surveys and questionnaires to obtain results on prevalence, method, and impact of cyberbullying, and as such takes on a very positivist, quantitative approach (e.g., Andrie, 2013; Bauman & Bellmore, 2015; Beran, Mishna, McInroy, & Shariff, 2015; Boyle et al., 2016; Brenan & Li, 2005; Cappadocia, Craig, & Pepler, 2013; Cassidy, Jackson, & Brown, 2009; Cénat et al., 2014; Dehue, Boleman, & Vollink, 2008; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Holfeld & Leadbeater, 2015; Kowalski & Limber, 2008; Law, Shapka, Hymel et al., 2012; ; Mishna, Cook, Gadalla, Daciuk, & Solomon, 2019; Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve, & Coulter, 2012). Only a handful of studies have attempted to explore the experiences of cyberbullied victims through qualitative measures such as interviews or focus groups (e.g., Agatston, Kowalski, & Limber, 2007; Grigg, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2008; Maher, 2008; McInroy & Mishna, 2017; Mishna, McLuckie, & Saini, 2009; Mishna, Saini, & Solomon, 2009; Nocentini et al., 2010; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008). These studies focused on various aspects of cyberbullying with both adolescent girls and boys. Only two studies have used qualitative methods to examine online gaming as a key forum for cyberbullying (e.g., Leung, 2013; McInroy & Mishna, 2017).

As our understanding of cyberbullying increases, new questions are raised. One area of cyberbullying research that has received minimal attention is youth's experiences of cyberbullying while gaming online (Ballard & Welch, 2017; Fryling, Cotler, Rivituso, Mathews, & Pratico, 2015; Leung 2010; Li & Pustaka, 2017; McInroy & Mishna, 2017; Yang, 2012). Online gaming is a term used to describe playing videogames on the internet against or in cooperation with other players. Within gameplay individuals can either chat or talk to one another using text or microphones and headsets (Fryling et al., 2015; Hinduja & Patchin, 2015, McInroy & Mishna, 2017; Raney, Smith, & Baker, 2006; Rigby & Ryan, 2011). Within Canada,

online gaming occurs most frequently amongst adolescent males. In fact, within Canada, 59% of teenagers play online games; and 71% of online gaming is played by adolescent boys (Lenhart, Smith, Anderson, Duggan, & Parrin, 2015; Steeves, 2015). Similar to the varied prevalence rates of cyberbullying, prevalence rates of cyberbullying in gaming is also varied, ranging from 1% - 57% (Ballard & Welch, 2017; Fryling et al., 2015; Leung 2010; Li & Pustaka, 2017; McInroy & Mishna, 2017; Pisch, 2010; Yang, 2012). Additionally, to date no research has specifically investigated cyberbullying while participating in online gaming with young adult males retrospectively discussing their adolescent experiences. With the expansion of technology and a decrease in adolescent face-to-face interactions, it is even more imperative to understand gaming culture and how adolescents view cyberbullying within the gaming community. By investigating the in-depth experiences of gaming culture and cyberbullying experiences among young adult males retrospectively discussing the experiences as teenagers, through focus groups, this study will describe how this group feels about gaming culture and cyber-bullying while playing online video games.

My Story

I belong to a newly developed micro-generation known as Xennials who were born between 1977 and 1985 not belonging to either Generation X or the Millennial Generation. We are sometimes referred to us as the *Oregon Trail Generation* which comes from the computer game of the same name. I am part of a unique generation that grew up at the same time that technology was evolving. We are part of the generation that saw the advancement of music consumption from cassettes, to CD's to downloading music through programs such as LimeWire and Napster to the current adaptation of streaming music, such as Spotify. Similarly, we have seen the change in how we watch movies, from Beta Max to VHS, to DVD's, to Blu-Rays, to

streaming services such as Netflix. We were the first to have home access to the internet starting at its infancy of dial up to the modern age of high-speed internet. The accessibility of the internet also helped with the development of home gaming systems.

Ever since I was young, myself, my brother, and our friends started off by going to our local arcade after school or on weekends to *hang out* together and bond. We would spend countless hours at each other's houses playing home gaming systems from Nintendo to Sega, to N64 to the Xbox and Playstation systems. Additionally, with the advancement of the internet, playing side by side in the same room became a thing of the past and we started playing games online with each other as well as with strangers.

The area of research that I have chosen is important to me because throughout my adolescence I enjoyed online gaming. With regards to negative behaviour, I did hear derogatory comments from other people. I never thought of this behaviour as cyberbullying. I thought my friends were just joking around and that this type of banter between friends was a normal part of gaming. Although now I rarely participate in online gaming, I remain well informed about the most recent games and remain peripherally involved in the gaming community.

The few studies that have investigated the relationship between online gaming and cyberbullying appear to be conducted by researchers who are not Xennials and who may not fully understand the gaming community. My prior involvement in online gaming was an important factor when conducting the focus groups because as an Xennial and previous online gamer, I came to this study from a point of understanding which allowed me access to the culture, a better understanding of the terminology, and a new ability to quickly build rapport with group members.

Statement of Purpose

It is often the case that behaviours observed in online gaming are identified as cyberbullying (Ballard & Welch, 2017; Frying et al., 2015; Li & Pustaka, 2017; McInroy & Mishna, 2017). However, the classification of gaming behaviours may not be that simple. Society currently places cyberbullying through online gaming in the same domain as other forms of cyberbullying (Ballard & Welch, 2017; Fryling et al., 2015; Hinduja & Patchin, 2015, Kowalski et al., 2014; Kowalski et al., 2008). This study investigated the gaming culture and the cyberbullying experiences among young adult males retrospectively reflecting on their adolescent online gaming experiences.

Theoretical Framework

This thesis explored adolescent and young adult males' behaviour in the gaming community. Typically, boys have been socialized to be seen as macho, to show bravado, to have a thick skin, and to not show emotions (McDiarmid, Gill, McLachlan, & Ali, 2016; Pollack, 2001). In physical game play, boys' behaviour typically involves competitive, aggressive, physical and confrontational conduct frequently explained by gender socialization theory (Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 2006). Teasing is common place for boys, particularly in sports, as a way to show their affection for one another without losing their perceptions of masculinity (Beck et al., 2007; Keltner, Capps, Kring, Young, & Heerey, 2001; McDiarmid et al., 2016). In these sport cultures, teasing and trash-talking is not only acceptable, but also seen as a rite of passage and as a form of healthy competition (Beck et al., 2007; Engerman, 2016; Keltner et al., 2001). Sports culture and boys behaviours informed this research in the exploration of how online friendships and boys gaming interactions happen. Particularly, the side-by-side and indirect gaming behaviour typically involving rough language and aggressive confrontational play fit

with the notion of boys being socialized into typically male macho, tough guy personas. How boys experience and understand their on-line friendships and interactions was explored in light of gender socialization.

Research Questions

This study used a basic qualitative research approach and focus group/interview data collection methods to explore and understand how young adults perceived their adolescent experiences of playing online games with others. This study asked the following research questions:

- (1) How do young adult males describe and understand their adolescent experiences of online gaming?
- (2) How do young adults males describe, understand, interpret, and explain the role that friendships played in their previous adolescent experiences of online gaming?
- (3) How do young male adults frame “normal” online gaming culture and how do they describe and understand cyberbullying?

By better understanding how young adults experience adolescent cyberbullying through their most common way of communicating electronically (i.e., videogames) we, as practitioners, educators, and psychologists can develop better ways of dealing with cyberbullying.

Definitions

It is important to operationally define the key concepts and terms being used in this study to ensure there is no confusion or misconceptions. For the purpose of this study, the following definitions and terminology will be used:

Adolescent/ adolescence. In this study this refers to children, specifically boys, between early (10-14) and middle adolescence (14-17) (World Health Organization, 1986).

Communication tools. Any electronic means by which people communicate such as text messaging, Instant Messaging (IM), web sites, chat rooms, E-mail, or social media sites (such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat) (Kowalski, & Limber, 2008).

Cyberbullying. In this study cyberbullying will be defined as:

[...]Any behavior performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicates hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others. Additionally, in cyberbullying experiences the identity of the bully may or may not be known. Cyberbullying can occur through electronically mediated communication at school; however cyberbullying behaviors commonly occur outside of school as well. (Tokunaga, 2010, p. 278)

Direct/overt aggression. This refers to aggressive behaviours that focus on power and dominance. These behaviours are typically seen in traditional bullying and include such features as physical violence or verbal threats (Connell, Schell-Bussey, Pearce, & Negro, 2014).

Indirect/relational aggression. This refers to aggressive behaviours that focus on damaging relationships. These behaviours typically include concepts such as rumour spreading, and exclusion (Connell et al., 2014).

Information and communications technology (hereafter ICT and/or technology). refers to technologies that provide access to information through telecommunications. It focuses primarily on communication technologies. This includes the Internet, wireless networks, cell phones, and other communication mediums (Christensson, 2010).

Massively multiplayer online games (hereafter MMOG/MMOGs). These are videogames that allow a large number of players to participate simultaneously over an internet

connection. This can range anywhere from 100's to 1000's of people. These games usually take place in a shared virtual world (Chan & Vorderer, 2006).

Macho behaviour. This refers to behaving in a way that is thought to be typical of a man, especially by appearing strong and powerful but also determined to avoid showing weakness and sympathy (Cambridge dictionary).

Online gaming. This refers to videogames in which individuals play against or in cooperation with other players via the internet. Within game play individuals can either chat or talk to one another using text or headsets. For the majority of the population this would be through a PC or gaming console (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015).

Online disinhibition. The process of using the cover of the internet to engage in behaviours that an individual may not engage in face-to-face interactions (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015).

Prescribed behaviour. According to social norms theory these are behaviours that are considered appropriate in a specific culture (Hechter & Opp, 2011).

Proscribed behaviour. According to social norms theory these are behaviours that are deemed inappropriate or behaviours that are censured by a specific culture (Hechter & Opp, 2011).

Trash-talking. Defined as “disparaging, taunting, or boastful comments especially between opponents trying to intimidate each other” (Merriam-Webster, 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trash%20talk>).

Overview of Chapters

This thesis proposal is organized into five chapters. Chapter one contains an introduction and the purpose and importance of the research study. Chapter two comprises a review of the literature dealing with technology usage, traditional bullying, cyberbullying, gender differences in cyberbullying, gender socialization, competition, and friendship formation. The chapter concludes with an evaluation of the current findings and limitations of cyberbullying research. The third chapter consists of the methodology involved in this study including participant recruitment, data collection through focus groups and interviews, planned methods of thematic analysis, and ethical considerations. The fourth chapter presents the results of the data and the various themes that emerged from the collected data. The fifth and final chapter involves a discussion of how this current study relates to previous research as well as considerations for future research.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Chapter two will discuss the relevant literature related to cyberbullying, friendships, and online gaming and is divided into ten sections. The use of technology as well as the benefits and consequences of using technology will be reviewed first. Second, the definition of cyberbullying and all of its component parts will be examined. Following this, the different types of cyberbullying and the various technologies used to cyberbully will be explored in the third section. Fourth, the theories associated with cyberbullying as well as the characteristics of cyberbullies will be examined. The prevalence, impact, and gender differences associated with cyberbullying will be reviewed in the fifth section followed by an examination of gender socialization and friendship formation as well as how friendships have changed in the online world in the sixth and seventh sections. The eighth section will review the limited literature on gaming and cyberbullying. The ninth section will examine the qualitative research in cyberbullying. The review of the literature will conclude with an examination of the gaps within cyberbullying and gaming research and how this study will address those issues.

Use of Technology

Currently, the use of ICT is a constant in the lives of most adolescents and young adults (Cassidy et al., 2009; Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Li, 2005; Tokunaga, 2010; University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Center for Communication Policy, 2014). Compared to past generations who have primarily used technology as an aid in communicating with others, or assisting in educational or vocational tasks, for the current generation technology is a way of life. In fact, it is not uncommon for children to teach their parents how to use various types of technology (i.e., Internet, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other mediums) (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; 2015). Over the years, a variety of large scale surveys have demonstrated the exponential

increase in the use of technology for both adults and adolescents (Center for Digital Future Report, 2015; Media Awareness Network, 2015; The Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2015).

In today's modern age, more so than in previous generations, the use of technology has increased exponentially (UCLA Center for Communication Policy, 2014). Lenhart et al. (2015) found that 92% of youth ages 13-17 were online daily. In fact, compared to 2000, when only 67% of the American population had access to the Internet, in 2014 this percentage increased to approximately 91% (UCLA Center for Communication Policy, 2014). Canadian data estimates indicate that in 2000, 51.3% of the population used the Internet. This percentage increased to 88.5% in 2016 (Internet Live Stats, 2017). Furthermore, the number of hours individuals spend online per week has also increased substantially. Compared to 2000, when Americans spent approximately 9.4 hours per week online, in 2015 Americans reported spending 21.5 hours per week online doubling the time spent online (Common Sense 2015; UCLA Center for Communication Policy, 2014). Within Canada, 2016 data indicates that Canadians spend approximately 24.5 hours per week online (Vomiero, 2017). There have also been dramatic changes to the methods of connecting online. While there appears to be a decrease in internet usage via the desktop computer, there has also been an associated increase in internet use via the cell phone and other portable devices such as tablets or electronic readers (UCLA Center for Communication Policy, 2014). Some of the most common activities for internet users include checking and responding to email, finding information, banking, shopping, listening to music, watching television or movies, and playing video games (CIRA Tracking Research, 2016; UCLA Center for Communication Policy, 2014).

While the general population in both Canada and the United States report a high rate of internet access, this rate increases to approximately 100% when examining children and adolescents access to the internet (UCLA Center for Communication Policy 2014; Steeves, 2015). Not surprisingly, as children get older, they have greater access to and ownership of their own personal electronic devices such as laptops, tablets, and cell phones (Steeves, 2015). In 2014, approximately 24% of Canadian students in grade four reported owning their own cell phone. This percentage jumps to 52% in grade seven, followed by 85% in grade 11 (Steeves, 2015). Given that older children have their own personal devices, it stands to reason that they would have more independence and less supervision while using these devices than younger children (Steeves, 2015).

Nonetheless, while access to the internet is important, it is also vital to understand the kinds of online activities Canadian children and adolescents participate in. Overall, Canadian children and adolescents report that the primary use of the internet is for entertainment and communicating with friends and family. According to the Canadian Teens Online Survey, in 2015, the most common internet activities Canadian teens participated in were playing online video games (59%), reading or posting on someone else's social network, such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram (52%), downloading or streaming music, television, or movies (51%), and posting on their own social networking site (41%) (Steeves, 2015). With regards to Facebook accounts, approximately 32% of Canadian children in grades 4-6 report having an account, despite user agreements indicating that users must be at least 13 years of age to have a personal account (Steeves, 2015). Moreover, the number of Canadian students having a Facebook account increases to 67% in grade 7, followed by 95% of all teenagers surveyed report having an account by grade 11 (Steeves, 2015). While social media sites are one of the most popular online

activities for teens, there appears to be a gender difference in time spent on different social media sites. On average, girls spend more time on social media sites than do boys (1.5 hours compared to 52 minutes) (Common Sense, 2015). Statistics also indicate there are gender differences in how adolescents go online. Within Canada more boys report accessing the internet through a desktop computer (27% of boys compared to 18% of girls), while more girls than boys report accessing the internet through a laptop computer (71% compared to 68%) (Steeves, 2015).

Although there are many avenues to play online games, American studies indicated that approximately 56% of teenagers play games online (Common Sense, 2015; Lenhart & Page, 2015). The most common reported type of online gaming was via mobile devices (such as tablets, phones, or Ipods) at 34% (Common Sense, 2015). The next common type of online gaming occurred via gaming consoles (Xbox, Playstation, Nintendo) at 25%, followed by computer games at 14% (Common Sense, 2015). In terms of gender, 91% of boys compared to 70% of girls owned or had access to a gaming console (Lenhart & Page, 2015).

While owning a console is one factor, usage of the console is another. Approximately 41% of boys report playing console games as compared to only 7% of girls, regardless of whether the games are online or not (Common Sense, 2015). Additionally, 84% of boys and 59% of girls report engaging in online gaming (Common Sense, 2015). Similarly, within Canada, 59% of teenagers report playing online games but there is also a discrepancy in the gender of players as 71% of boys, as compared to 47% of girls, report playing online games (Steeves, 2015). In an American study, approximately 83% of teens report having access to a gaming console in their house, and many (mostly boys) have a console in their rooms (48% of boys) (Common Sense, 2015).

With regards to time spent playing online games, American youth report spending approximately 1.25 hours a day playing online games (Common Sense, 2015). This time duration is further divided by gender whereby boys report spending approximately 56 minutes a day playing online games compared to 7 minutes per day for girls (Common Sense, 2015). This gender difference also extends to enjoyment of online games with 27% of boys reporting playing online games is their favourite online activity as compared to only 2% of the girls (Common Sense, 2015).

Benefits and Consequences of Technology and Internet Use

Research on online activities has predominantly focused on the negative effects of technology and internet use including health issues, such as muscle pain, and poor eating and sleeping patterns; emotional and psychological issues such as attention problems and low self-esteem, as well as school performance issues (Boyle et al., 2016; Brooks, Chester, Smeeton, & Spencer, 2016; Griffiths et al., 2011). Currently, the fifth edition of Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5) has not developed a disorder for online addiction or gaming addiction, however it is an area that they have determined requires future research and these new addiction disorders may be included in the next DSM edition.

However, technology and the internet also provide many benefits for adolescents and young adults. For instance, with technology, children and adolescents are able to access knowledge and information much more quickly than ever before (Guan & Subrahmanyam, 2009). Students no longer need to go to the library to look up resources to complete school reports, information is at their fingertips using the web. Even teachers have begun using social networking sites or web pages where their students can access homework or ask questions about assignments (Guan & Subrahmanyam, 2009; Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). The internet has also

helped children and adolescents maintain close ties with friends and family by helping them communicate, especially when they are living in different cities (Blais, Craig, Pepler, & Connolly, 2008). It is even possible to see friends and family while talking online through programs such as Skype. Additionally, the internet has provided opportunities for teenagers to interact with each other as well as build and maintain friendships without the supervision of adults. In the past this type of relationship building might have taken place at a local park or shopping mall, but today it often occurs in the online world (Cole & Griffiths, 2007; Engram, 2016; Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Ito et al, 2008; Mishna et al., 2010).

Furthermore, although the media frequently portrays video games as a cause of teen violence, research has shown that gaming improves social networks, bonding, friendship formation, comradery, social support, identity formation, self-awareness, resilience, mood, attention, processing skills, literacy skills, communication skills, memory, visual-spatial skills, hand-eye coordination, problem solving and strategic skills (Beavis, 2015; Boyle et al., 2016; Brooks et al., 2016; Cade & Gates, 2017; Cole & Griffiths, 2007; Durkin & Barber, 2002; Engerman, 2016; Granic, Lobel, & Engles, 2014). While there are many benefits to using the internet in this technological age, technology can also be a *double-edged sword*. Although the vast majority of adolescents do not misuse the internet to mistreat others, one of the main technological issues adolescents face today is cyberbullying.

Defining Cyberbullying

As technology use has increased, a phenomena, typically termed cyberbullying, has developed. As discussed in the Introduction, for the purpose of this study, cyberbullying has been defined as:

...any behavior performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicates hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others. Additionally, in cyberbullying experiences the identity of the bully may or may not be known. Cyberbullying can occur through electronically mediated communication at school; however cyberbullying behaviors commonly occur outside of school as well. (Tokunaga, 2010, p.278)

One of the major difficulties in studying cyberbullying has been the lack of a cohesive definition of cyberbullying (Baas, DeJong, & Drossaert, 2013; Grigg, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Holfeld & Leadbeater, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2014; Kowalski et al., 2008; Law, Shapka, Domene & Gagné, 2012; Menesini et al., 2013; Pieschl, Kuhlmann, & Porsch, 2015; Pieschl, Porsch, Kahl, & Klockenbusch, 2013; Vandebosch & Cleemput, 2008). There is even debate as to the correct spelling of the word (i.e., is it one or two words? With or without a hyphen?) (Kowalski & Limber, 2008; Tokanuga, 2010). Even the terminology used in cyberbullying research varies (Kowalski et al., 2008; Li, 2005; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Shariff, 2008; Smith, Del Barrio, & Tokunaga, 2013). Words such as cyberbullying, internet harassment, and internet aggression have been used interchangeably while discussing cyberbullying, which further creates confusion over the definition of the word (Law, Shapka, Hymel et al., 2012).

Kowalski, and colleagues' (2014) meta-synthesis of 131 academic research papers on cyberbullying ranging from 2005-2013 demonstrated the significant variation in definitions used to define cyberbullying and the consequent challenge in analyzing these studies. Almost every study they examined used a different definition of cyberbullying. The authors identified a key study by Juvonen and Gross (2008) that did not use the term cyberbullying, instead asked if the participant had experienced *mean things* online. Examples such as this makes defining

cyberbullying extremely difficult. Cyberbullying synonyms such as electronic bullying, e-bullying, cyber harassment, text/SMS bullying, mobile bullying, and digital bullying have been used interchangeably with cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). Some researchers believe that cyberbullying is an electronic means of traditional bullying (Brenan & Li, 2008; 2007; Wolke, Lereya, & Tippett, 2016), while other researchers believe that while cyberbullying contains some elements of traditional bullying, it is in fact something new and different (Cassidy, Brown, & Jackson, 2012; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; 2015; Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Kowalski et al., 2008; Li, 2005; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Spears, Slee, Owens, & Johnson 2009; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004).

In 2012, Law, Shapka, Domene and colleagues conducted a study to identify elements of online and offline bullying. In this study Olweus' (1991, 1993) definition of traditional bullying was used: "...a person is being bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons" (1993, p. 9). This definition identified three aspects of traditional bullying: (1) a power differential between victim and bully; (2) intention to harm; and (3) repeated harm over time. While it appears that traditional bullying, according to the Olweus definition, incorporates the elements associated with cyberbullying, these aspects of traditional bullying play out differently in cyberbullying. This suggests that cyberbullying may be a different phenomenon and not just a new tool for traditional bullying, as previously thought by researchers. The criteria traditionally associated with bullying – power imbalance, intentionality and repetition – also exist in cyberbullying. However, additional factors appear to be integral to cyberbullying including anonymity, disinhibition, deindividuation, and lack of supervision (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Navarro & Serna, 2016; Naruskov, Luik,

Nocentini, & Menseini, 2012; Smith et al., 2013; Wilton & Campbell, 2011). Features of cyberbullying behaviour will be discussed below.

Power imbalance. According to Law, Shapka, Hymel and colleagues (2012), the power imbalance in cyberbullying is not necessarily based on the perpetrator's possession of power (such as physical size or popularity) but rather is due to the victim's lack of power (Law, Shapka, Hymel et al., 2012). For instance, as opposed to physical strength, as seen in traditional bullying, having the technological know-how, skills, or vital information (such as incriminating knowledge or pictures), can create a power imbalance in the online world (Goldsmid & Howe, 2014; Grigg, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2014; Law, Shapka, Domene et al., 2012; Menesini et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2013). Another factor associated with power imbalance as it relates to cyberbullying is that a victim may be powerless to defend him/herself if they do not know where the malicious information came from. Furthermore, a victim may also feel powerless due to the sheer number of people the harmful information can reach (Grigg, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2013; Nocentini et al., 2010).

Nocentini and colleagues (2010) investigated the different behaviours associated with cyberbullying and five criteria in the definition of cyberbullying. This focus group study involved 70 adolescents from three European countries (Germany, Italy, and Spain). What the authors discovered related to power imbalance was that all participants had a difficult time separating power imbalance and intent to harm. Due to the fluid and ever-changing nature of the power imbalance criterion in cyberspace, some researchers have even decided to remove it from their definition of cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015) or have incorporated power imbalance with intent to harm (Menesini et al., 2013; Nocentini et al., 2010). McInroy and Mishna (2017) found the use of power and aggression was characteristic of online gaming

culture. Forms of violence were constant in online gaming. Text, chat, and voice use where insults, trash-talking and swearing exist was ubiquitous and not always defined or experienced as cyberbullying (McInroy & Mishna, 2017).

Intentionality/Intent to harm. To further support the idea that cyberbullying is distinct from traditional bullying, ‘intent to harm’ must also be investigated. Within the traditional forms of bullying, intent to harm typically involves three criteria (Law, Shapka, Hymel et al., 2012). The first criteria is that the victim must experience actual harm. The second criteria is that the perpetrator intended the behaviour to occur and that the intention was to harm the individual involved. The third criteria involves judgement of the intent to harm. More specifically, would a reasonable person deem that the action likely caused harm to the individual (Smith et al., 2013). In relation to cyberbullying, research has shown that adolescents consider ‘intent to harm’ an important component in defining cyberbullying (Cuadrado-Gordillo & Antelo, 2016; Menesini et al., 2013; Nocentini et al., 2010). If intent is not perceived to be present, and adolescents perceive an online incident as being a joke, it is not considered cyberbullying (Nocentini et al., 2010). In adolescent online activities, friends or others may say or do something that is intended as a joke but is perceived negatively. The perpetrator did not have intention to harm but the event in this situation would still be considered cyberbullying (Menesini et al., 2013; Nocentini et al., 2010). However, some researchers have found that adolescents themselves find it more important that the victim was harmed than whether the perpetrator had intended to cause harm (Menesini et al., 2013; Nocentini et al., 2010). As in traditional bullying, this harmful behaviour must be repeated over time to be defined as cyberbullying.

Repetition/ Virility. Repeated harm over time in cyberbullying is not always a matter of frequency or immediacy. Repeatability may not only be a matter of the perpetrator’s repeated

behaviours, comments, or the amount of uploads they engage in; it could also be defined as the amount of times the information has been seen by others (Grigg, 2010). In cyberbullying, once an incident occurs, it is forever on the internet (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013; Li, 2006). As such, the criteria of repetition as viewed through cyberbullying has become inconsequential; anything posted has the ability to go viral, increasing the target's victimization exponentially (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Nocentini et al., 2010). This impact can be detrimental to the victims as they and others can repeatedly view and relive the incident. Not only can one occurrence be communicated to one victim, it can also be sent to an infinite number of other readers (Kota, Schoohs, Benson, & Moreno, 2014). For instance, if one person makes a negative comment or posts a picture on a social networking site (such as Facebook) about an unsuspecting teen, not only will the teen see it, but the comment will be seen by others who may in turn comment, tag, or share it with an infinite number of other individuals. Compared to traditional bullying, where a victim has a temporary reprieve from the situation when they get home from school, in cyberbullying, because the offensive material may be constantly viewed by the victim or others, there also appears to be no escape from it. Furthermore, there is no longer a separation of school and home life as teenagers seamlessly flow between the online and face-to-face world. In the technological age of cyberbullying where adolescents constantly have access to their phones, tablets or laptops and social media, there is often no escape from the harassment.

Anonymity. At one point when cyberbullying research was in its infancy, anonymity was considered a key characteristic (Barlett, 2015; Li, 2005). One early Canadian study surveyed grade seven students in an urban city and found that, of the students who experienced cyberbullying, 41% did not know their perpetrator (Li, 2005). More current research has found that anonymity may not be as integral to the definition of cyberbullying as once thought (Hinduja

& Patchin, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2014; Mishna, Saini et al., 2009; Mishna et al., 2010; Nocentini et al. 2010). One reason for this is that even if someone makes a hateful comment anonymously, newer technology has emerged to identify where the message came from, as every device has a unique way of being identified (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). Even with the use of pseudonyms on social networking sites and gaming consoles, participants can still be identified. Rarely are victims reporting that the malicious comments are coming from random individuals (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). One study conducted by Mishna et al. (2010), examined prevalence rates of cyberbullying, as well as the types of technologies used to cyberbully in a sample of 2,186 Canadian elementary and high school students. In this 2010 study, five years following Li's research (2005), the authors discovered that 89% of the victims knew their perpetrator, most of them being from their social circles (such as friends, former friends, former love interests, or others) (Mishna et al., 2010).

While anonymity may not be a vital component to cyberbullying, when it comes to the impact anonymity has on the victims, research has been inconsistent. Some researchers have found that when cyberbullying was conducted anonymously, individuals experienced the behaviours as more harmful than when they knew the perpetrator (Slonje & Smith, 2008; Sticca & Parren, 2013). In contrast, other research has suggested that knowing the perpetrator is more hurtful (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2014; Mishna et al., 2010; Nocentini et al., 2010). Anonymity has also been linked with increased levels of online disinhibition, a decrease in deindividuation, as well as an increase in lack of supervision.

Online disinhibition and deindividuation. Online disinhibition refers to using the cover of the internet to engage in behaviours that an individual may not engage in face-to-face interactions (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). While online disinhibition can be positive - for instance,

going online may help an adolescent overcome shyness - it is more commonly associated with negative outcomes (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). When cyberbullying, individuals may feel more empowered to make statements about others that they would not say in person, due to shame, guilt or embarrassment.

Related to anonymity and online disinhibition, deindividuation also plays a role in defining cyberbullying as a unique behaviour. Deindividuation, is the phenomenon of separating oneself from their actions (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Peter, Valkenburg, & Schouten, 2005; Ward & Tracey, 2004). It is as if when engaged in the online world, individuals lose themselves and may feel more empowered behind the safety of the computer screen, and free from society's pressures of conscience, ethics and morality (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; 2015; Smith et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2013). Whereas adolescents might have been ashamed or feared the consequences of their actions in face-to-face communication, it appears that they do not necessarily have this same fear when it comes to online harassment (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). It is much easier and takes less courage to type harmful messages on a keyboard than it is to say those same comments in a face-to-face conversation (Pelfrey & Weber, 2014).

Lack of supervision. Not surprisingly, in this technological age, as teenagers get older, they have access to their own personal devices (i.e., laptops or phones) and as such parental supervision of what the adolescent does online becomes more difficult and therefore supervision becomes more lax. Lack of supervision also applies to the platforms the adolescents use. Unless a complaint has been filed, phone companies, social media sites (i.e., Facebook or Twitter) and gaming consoles do not monitor the content being sent to individuals. Consequently, teenagers may feel more empowered to say something malicious online as opposed to a face-to-face format, as they have less of a chance of being caught or punished for their actions.

In summary, cyberbullying is more complex than traditional bullying encompassing many different facets related to internet use. The problem with cyberbullying in this technological age is that it can occur at any time, through various modalities, providing shelter from society's sanctions while reaching multiple people (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Kowalski & Limber, 2008; Walker, Craven & Tokunaga, 2013).

Types of Cyberbullying and Technology Used

While the term cyberbullying can be defined in various ways, either with or without components of traditional bullying, it is important to understand that cyberbullying encompasses a wide range of activities and forms. This section will thus provide a brief overview of the kinds of cyberbullying adolescents engage in. The activities and technologies used are not an exhaustive list but are those the most commonly utilized by children and adolescents.

The most common and well known type of cyberbullying is rumour and information spreading. This can also be referred to as denigration and *outing*. Partially due to its relational form of aggression, rumour spreading is most often perpetrated by girls primarily through social media sites (such as Facebook), reaching a vast number of people within the shortest period of time (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). The most common type of information sent to others include personal information, such as address, phone number or email address, as well as personal details about an individual that they may not want to be known such as sexual orientation, sexual experiences, family problems or medical history. This type of cyberbullying is usually performed by individuals with malicious intent, who find out information and then post it online. Rumour and information spreading is primarily due to rivalry or jealousy (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2008). Another way for this form of cyberbullying to occur is when adolescents unintentionally are careless with what they say online and accidentally post something about a

friend that they should not have posted. Regardless of the reason, the difficulty is that once the information is online, the damage cannot be undone. Concurrent with rumour and information spreading, an adjunct way of causing harm to others online is by posting pictures and videos and/or Photo-Shopping or editing the images. Information or rumour spreading and posting pictures and videos are primarily promoted through captioning, tagging, commenting, liking, and messaging (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2008).

Relatedly, 'tagging' refers to connecting a person to a specific piece of information on social media, so that the person is aware they should look at the material (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). So how would this whole process look like in relation to cyberbullying? An individual intent on spreading a harmful rumour or information would first post the information or pictures on social media (Facebook). The information posted will usually include a hurtful comment. The perpetrator would then tag other individuals on Facebook to inform those adolescents to look at the posted item on Facebook. This in turn allows other people to comment, or tag other people. This creates a snowball effect in which one picture posted by one individual can quickly and easily spread throughout the school or further. Interestingly, another way cyberbullying occurs is through exclusion or ostracism. As social beings, people have a need to be included and avoid exclusion; this is especially true for children and adolescents. Thus, excluding individuals from group chats, or social media groups can create emotional difficulties for the individuals excluded (Kowalski et al., 2008).

Other common types of cyberbullying that adolescents participate in are *flaming* and *trolling* (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2008). Both are brief and usually conducted by posting hostile angry or annoying messages for the sole purpose of provoking the emotions of one or more people. These behaviours occur most often in discussion boards, forums and in the

comments section of online articles. Flaming and trolling in no way promote the online discussion, they are just comments intended to hurt others (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). The major difference between flaming and trolling is that flaming targets a specific topic of discussion to elicit responses from others, while trolling is directed toward a specific individual or individuals. Another major difference between the two is that with flaming there is often an exchange of words between participants; whereas in trolling it may just be the perpetrator making comments about an individual (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). While both flaming and trolling involve saying something extremely harsh for the purpose of evoking emotions, someone who is flaming will make a claim because they believe it has some truth to it, whereas trolls will often say things to an individual that are inaccurate, irrelevant and ridiculous (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2008).

Cyber-harassment is often defined as "... using technology to induce fear, to threaten, to annoy or otherwise harass someone else" (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015. Pp 65), and is similar to flaming except that it often involves more repetitive cyberbullying behaviours and is usually targeted to one individual by a single or by multiple perpetrators. Since social media is available almost anywhere at any time, it has become much easier for cyber-stalkers to find out information about their victims. This can be done by pretending to be an online friend or follower (Facebook and Instagram respectively), or going onto the victim's profile if it is not locked and becoming them. The main difference between cyber-stalking and cyber-harassment is that the former usually involves more threats than harassing behaviours. On a related note physical threats can also be administered online. If, for example, a bully wanted to beat up another adolescent after school he might post on the victim's Facebook wall "I'm going to kill you after school". Although it is important to differentiate between actual threats and something

adolescents say in the moment, but with no real harm attached, Hinduja and Patchin (2008) discovered that for 17% of all students who reported cyberbullying threats, the threats were in fact carried out. This implies that cyberbullying threats should not be taken lightly.

Another common type of cyberbullying is *impersonation*. This involves assuming someone else's online profile and pretending to be another person. This can be done by stealing someone's password and using their own accounts or creating a new account with the victim's name associated with it. While impersonating someone else, cyberbullies are able to say hurtful comments to others, which in turn can ruin both the impersonated person's (making them a victim also) and the intended victim's reputations. A more recent form of impersonation has become popular over the last few years called *catfishing*. This refers to creating a fake online profile for the purpose of attracting a potential victim into a fake romantic relationship. If the cyberbully gains the victim's trust, the target may be more susceptible to sending inappropriate pictures or videos which the perpetrator can either post or use as blackmail. Due to the nature of impersonation, this form of cyberbullying is often seen as more calculating as it involves much more planning than just posting or commenting on a post (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2008).

Flooding, another type of cyberbullying occurs in chat rooms or in chat within a game, where one person will continuously hit the return key in order to prevent any other individual from communicating in the chat. This is often used as a form of intimidation and a way to obtain or keep control and power over the conversation (Maher, 2008).

In recent years, a new form of cyberbullying has emerged where adolescents film assaults of either strangers or people they know and afterwards post the images on the internet or social

media sites for others to view. This can have serious effects because not only may it be an indictable offense, it can also affect the victim psychologically (Kowalski et al., 2008).

Finally, it is important to note that regardless of the kind of cyberbullying that occurs, it can take place using almost any technological medium and often through multiple avenues. Due to the fast paced technological world, it is nearly impossible to list every possible technology available for teens to cyberbully or be cyberbullied, however the most common technologies used include instant messages, email, text messages, social networking sites, chat rooms, blogs, websites, bash boards and online gaming. It is important to remember that technology itself is a neutral outlet. It can be used for both good and bad; it is up to the users to decide how it is utilized (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015).

Theories of Cyberbullying

Despite the amount of research dedicated to cyberbullying and prevention, there has been minimal research dedicated to developing a theoretical framework for cyberbullying. Only in the last decade have researchers begun to explore the importance of a theoretical framework (Espelage, Rao, & Craven, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2013; Low & Espelage, 2013; Navarro & Jasinski, 2013; Patchin & Hinduja, 2011). Some possible theoretical explanations as to why cyberbullying occurs include the General Strain Theory, the Social Ecological Theory, Social Learning Theory, Routine Activity Theory, and Social Dominance Theory. The General Strain Theory has been applied to both traditional and cyberbullying with some success. Research has found that adolescents who experience strain in their lives are more likely to bully and cyberbully as a way to reduce their own stress (Patchin & Hinduja, 2011). The Social Ecological Theory has also been used to explain cyberbullying. This framework identifies a range of nested contextual systems that include family, friends, peers, school, community and culture that

influence a child and adolescent's bullying experience (Low & Espelage, 2013). Research has found that individual, family, and school characteristics explain some cyberbullying activities (Low & Espelage, 2013). Social Learning Theory has also been posited as a way of explaining cyberbullying. It has been theorized that cyberbullying may be a consequence of social norms. It is unclear if social norms positively reinforce cyberbullying. For example, when an adolescent 'likes' or comments on a harmful post, do these actions negatively reinforce the cyberbullying behaviour? Conversely social norms may discipline offenders by causing adolescents to either report the cyberbullying or call the perpetrators out (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013).

Routine Activities Theory has also been applied to cyberbullying. This theory claims that in order for cyberbullying to occur three factors need to be present: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and lack of a capable guardian (Marcum, Higgins, & Ricketts, 2010; Navarro & Jasinski, 2013). Proponents of the Routine Activity Theory claim that due to lack of appropriate supervision, a motivated offender will have greater ease finding suitable targets in the less risky online environment and thus be more likely to cyberbully (Navarro & Jasinski, 2013; Walker et al., 2013). Social Dominance Theory has also been used to explain cyberbullying. Investigating how oppression, discrimination, and prejudice produce and reinforce social inequality amongst minority groups helps inform and understand bullying (Sidanius & Pratto, 2012). Bullying is used to exert dominance and reinforce power relationships (Morales, Yubero, & Larranaga, 2016). Macho behaviour is exercised to exert control and power on the internet (McDiarmid et al., 2016). Macho behaviour is often defined as behaving in a way that is thought to be typical of a man, especially by appearing strong and powerful but also determined to avoid showing weakness and sympathy (Cambridge dictionary). While these theories have the potential to

explain aspects of cyberbullying, much more research needs to be conducted in order to develop a comprehensive theory of cyberbullying.

Characteristics of Cyberbullies and Bully-Victims

Research examining the personality and social characteristics of cyberbullies (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; 2013; 2015; Kowalski et al., 2008; Mishna, Khoury-Kassabri, Gadalla & Daciuk, 2012; Vazsonyi, Machackova, Sevcikova, Smahel, & Cerna, 2012; Wolke et al., 2016) has identified five major categories associated with cyberbullying characteristics including: (1) demographics, (2) psychological/personality characteristics, (3) family dynamics, (4) school climate, and (5) peer relationships.

With regards to demographics, research has investigated the age, sex, race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status (hereafter SES) characteristics of cyberbullies (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Mishna et al., 2012). Mishna and colleagues (2012) examined the age and sex differences of cyberbullying perpetrators. They discovered as children age, the rates of cyberbullying and being a bully–victim also increased. They found that children in grades ten and eleven were significantly more likely to be involved in cyberbullying than six and seventh graders (38.6 compared to 28.2%) . Other researchers who have examined age differences in cyberbullying have also discovered that as age increases so do rates of cyberbullying (Beran et al, 2015; Grigg, 2010; Holfeld & Leadbeater, 2015; Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2008; Kowalski et al., 2014; Pisch, 2010; Smith et al., 2013; Tokanuga, 2008); When it came to gender in cyberbullying, Mishna and colleagues (2012) did not find any significant relationships. However, it is important to note that many other researchers have found gender differences in cyberbullying behaviours. These gender differences research has indicated that females are more likely to be cyberbullied and more likely to be engaged in cyberbullying behaviour than their

male counterparts (Connell et al., 2014; Hinduja and Patchin, 2008; 2015; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Kowalski et al., 2014; Schneider et al., Coulter, 2012; Tokunaga, 2010).

Few studies have directly investigated cyberbullying and race and ethnicity, and results have been inconsistent. Most studies have shown little to no relationship between cyberbullying and ethnicity (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Schneider et al., 2012). However, in a large representative sample of American youth, ages 11 through 16, Wang, Iannotti, and Nansel (2009) did find relationships between race and cyberbullying. They discovered that within the United States, African American adolescents were more likely to cyberbully others than adolescents who identified as White or Hispanic. More research is needed in order to obtain a better understanding of the relationships between race, ethnicity and cyberbullying. Finally, limited research on cyberbullying and SES exists, however, they have demonstrated no relationship between SES, being a cyberbully, a victim, a bully-victim or individuals not involved in cyberbullying (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004a; 2004b).

With respect to the psychological and personality characteristics associated with cyberbullying, research has typically investigated the areas of aggression/anti-social behaviour, internalizing behaviour, and empathy. In Wolke and colleagues' (2016) review of the literature regarding cyberbullying and aggression, results suggested that children who scored higher on aggression, and demonstrated higher levels of anti-social behaviour also had a tendency to cyberbully others more frequently. Leung and McBride-Chang (2013) found similar results where risk factors for being a cyberbully perpetrator included online game use, exposure to violence in the media, risky internet behaviours, traditional or cyberbullying experiences, and lack of parental guidance. In contrast, lower levels of these factors were related to less cyberbullying.

It is important to note that many of the studies involving the characteristics of cyberbullies have led to inconsistent results. When examining the relationship between cyberbullying and internalizing factors (such as anxiety, depression, and self-esteem), research has shown that adolescents with higher levels of social anxiety and lower levels of self-esteem were more likely to be cyberbullies and/or bully-victims (Cénat et al., 2014). Similarly, another study found that children with lower levels of self-esteem were also more likely to be cyberbullies and bully-victims (Cénat et al., 2014; Kowalski & Limber, 2013). Research has also identified a relationship between empathy and cyberbullying behaviour (Sticca & Perren, 2013). Some researchers have reported that adolescents who score lower on empathy scales have a tendency to cyberbully more often (Sticca & Perren, 2013). Conversely, other research suggests that while those who scored lower on empathy did cyberbully more frequently, the relationship between low levels of empathy and cyberbullying behaviour was not statistically significant (Almeida, Correia, & Maarinho, 2009). Furthermore, a study conducted by Vazsonyi and colleagues (2012) of over 25,000 students from 25 different European countries, found a significant relationship between low self-control and cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying behaviour has also been linked to parenting styles. One study found that being a cyberbully was positively related to having parents with an authoritarian style of parenting (Dilmac & Aydogan, 2010). A later study by Dehue et al., (2012) found cyberbullying behaviour to be related to both authoritarian and neglectful parenting styles. These findings are consistent with other studies that examined cyberbullying (victimization and perpetration) and parental monitoring (Navarro & Jasinski, 2013; Twyman, Saylor, Taylor, & Comeaux, 2010). According to this research, the less monitoring children and adolescents had, the more likely they were to engage in cyberbullying behaviour or victimization (Twyman et al., 2010). To further

support the relationship between cyberbullying and parenting, Wang and colleagues (2009) examined the relationship between cyberbullying and four parental supports including: providing parental support when needed, demonstrating loving behaviour, understanding their child's problems, and reassuring their child when upset. They found that the cyberbullies had significantly less parental social support in all four domains. In a more recent study Hinduja and Patchin (2013) discovered a similar relationship between lack of parental support and cyberbullying behaviour.

There also appears to be a connection between domestic violence and cyberbullying behaviour. Although no studies have examined this specifically, one study conducted by Calvete, Orue, Estevez, Villardon, and Padilla (2010) examined the relationship between cyberbullying and violence exposure across four settings: home, school, community, and television. They discovered a significant relationship between cyberbullying perpetration and all four settings. While the authors acknowledged that domestic violence in itself is not a risk factor for cyberbullying behaviour, their research suggested an association between domestic violence and cyberbullying behaviours. More research is needed in order to determine the exact nature of this relationship.

Not only is the family environment associated with cyberbullying behaviour, so is the school setting. Various studies have found that adolescents who viewed their schools as less trusting, less fair, unpleasant and unsafe, are less connected to their schools, and who rated their teachers less positively, were engaged in more cyberbullying behaviours (Bayer & Ucanok, 2012; Sourander et al., 2010; Williams & Guerra, 2007). With regards to peer relationships, cyberbullies share similar characteristics to traditional bullies in that they typically have good peer relationships and are often viewed as being popular. Conversely, bully – victims tend to

have fewer friends (Sourander et al., 2010). With regard to peer influences, Hinduja and Patchin (2013) discovered that cyberbullies were more likely to engage in cyberbullying behaviour if their peers were also engaged in cyberbullying perpetration.

When asking the question ‘why teenagers cyberbully’, some of the most common responses include boredom, gaining attention, asserting power to gain or keep popularity, retaliation, jealousy, channeling aggression or acting out aggressive fantasies. In this respect, children and adolescents who appear to act like the ‘perfect child’ in one context (such as home or school life) sometimes engage in cyberbullying behaviour online as a way to lash out and temporarily separate themselves from that ‘perfect’ persona (Kowalski et al., 2008). Finally, it is important to note that although cyberbullies exhibit similar characteristics there is no simple ‘one size fits all’ profile for those who cyberbully.

Prevalence of Cyberbullying

While cyberbullying has been shown to be destructive and hurtful to victims, perpetrators, and witnesses (Campbell, Spears, Slee, Butler, & Kift, 2012; Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Law, Shapka, Domene et al., 2012; Mishna et al., 2010), studies on cyberbullying vary greatly with regard to the prevalence rates amongst adolescents. The major reason true prevalence rates are difficult to determine is due to definitional inconsistencies (Baas et al., 2013; Bauman, Underwood, & Card, 2013; Brenan et al., 2015; Grigg, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Holfeld & Leadbeater, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2008; Kowalski et al., 2014; Law, Shapka, Domene et al., 2012; Law, Shapka, Hymel et al., 2012; Menesini et al., 2013; Pieschl et al., 2015; Pieschl et al., 2013; Vandebosch & Cleemput, 2008). Additionally various assessment methods used to study cyberbullying such as surveys and questionnaires (e.g., Andrie, 2013; Baron et al., 2015; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; 2015; Holfeld & Leadbeater, 2015; Kowalski et

al., 2008; Law, Shapka, Hymel et al., 2012; McInroy & Mishna, 2017; Mishna et al., 2010; Mitchell, Jones, Turner, Hattuck, & Wolak, 2016; Pisch, 2010; Smith et al., 2013) and the use of focus groups or interviews (e.g., Ackers, 2012; Allen, 2012; Baas et al., 2013; Bryce & Fraser, 2013; Compton, Campbell, & Mergler, 2014; Frisen, Berne, & Marin, 2014; Grigg, 2010; Law, Shapka, Domene et al., 2012; Maher, 2008; Mishna, McLuckie, et al., 2009; Mishna, Sinai et al., 2009; Navarro & Serna, 2016; Naruskov et al., 2012; Nocentini et al., 2010; Parris, Varjas, Meyers, & Cutts, 2012; Paul, Smith, & Blumberg, 2012; Pelfrey & Weber, 2014; Rafferty & Ven, 2014; Smith et al., 2008; Spears et al., 2009; Vanderbosch & Van Cleemput, 2008) can also affect the prevalence of cyberbullying. For instance, focus groups and interviews may develop a more in – depth understanding of cyberbullying than questionnaires (Craven, Marsh, & Parada, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2008; McInroy & Mishna, 2017; Mishna, & Van Wert, 2013; Mitchell et al., 2016).

Another reason why prevalence rates vary is due to issues of non-reporting (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). In one study, Hinduja and Patchin (2015) discovered that approximately 80% of cyberbullying victims do not report the event to an adult and approximately 25% did not discuss it with anyone (including friends). Although reporting rates may be on the upswing, most victims still do not report being cyberbullied for various reasons. One reason teenagers do not report cyberbullying is that they believe that adults are either not willing or not adequately able to stop it (Ackers, 2012; Allen, 2012; Agaston, Kowalski, & Limber, 2007; Baas et al., 2013; Bryce & Fraser, 2013; Frisen et al., 2014; Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; McInroy & Mishna, 2017; Mishna, McLuckie et al., 2009; Mishna, Sinai et al., 2009; Mitchell et al., 2016; Parris et al., 2012). A second reason adolescents do not report cyberbullying is for fear that their parents will think the solution is to take away the device from them (i.e., the computer or phone) (Cassidy et al., 2012;

Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Navarro & Serna, 2016; Pelfrey & Weber, 2014; Pisch, 2010; Smith et al., 2008; Spears et al., 2009). The adolescent may feel that they are being punished for being cyberbullied. Thirdly, when it comes to minor cyberbullying experiences, many adolescents choose to deal with it in their own way, such as blocking the bully, logging off for a period of time, or doing nothing (Ackers, 2012; Compton et al., 2014; Frisen et al., 2014; Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; McInroy & Mishna, 2017; Parris et al., 2012). Another reason why cyberbullying may not be reported is due to how they view or experience the events, which may be related to how boys and girls are socialized (Ackers, 2012; Allen, 2012; Baas et al., 2013; Bryce & Fraser, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; McInroy & Mishna, 2017; Mishna, McLuckie et al., 2009; Mishna, Sinai et al, 2009; Pelfrey & Weber, 2014; Smith et al., 2008; Spears et al., 2009). This will be discussed more in depth later in the review.

With reporting issues in mind, according to a meta-synthesis of 25 articles from 2004-2009 conducted by Tokunaga in 2010, prevalence rates range from approximately 20% - 40%. Kowalski and colleagues (2014) conducted a more recent meta-analysis of 131 academic papers focusing on the years ranging from 2005-2013. They found that between 10% - 40% of adolescents reported being cyberbullied. Similarly, Hinduja and Patchin (2015) reviewed 52 peer reviewed articles on cyberbullying victimization from 2007-2014 and identified a prevalence rate ranging from 2.3% - 72%. They also discovered that the rate of cyberbullying has increased from 18.8% in 2007 to 34.6% in 2014, with the average prevalence of those years falling within 25.2%. Another way of viewing these results is that according to the data, approximately one out of every five adolescents have been cyberbullied in their lifetime (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). Although this increase in victimization may appear problematic at first sight, it should be noted that one possible reason for this increase has been due to the advancement and ease of access to

technology.

Within Canada, there appears to be a similar trend in terms of prevalence rates. One 2015 study conducted by Holfeld and Leadbeater (2015) examined the frequencies of cyberbullying behaviours and victimization experiences within Canada from 2007-2013. The authors examined 15 peer reviewed articles and identified a prevalence rate of cyberbullying behaviours from 5% to 33.7% and cyberbullying victimization ranging from 10.8% to 49.5%. These results are consistent with Tokunaga's (2010) and Kowalski and colleagues' (2014) meta-syntheses. Furthermore, similar to Kowalski and colleagues' (2014) meta-synthesis, Holfeld and Leadbeater (2015) found that almost every Canadian study used a different definition of cyberbullying, different sample sizes, and different time frames in which the cyberbullying or victimization occurred. These results support the notion that prevalence rates are difficult to determine because of measurement issues. Other Canadian research on cyberbullying has found similar results in the differences of defining cyberbullying (Baren et al., 2015; Bonanno & Hymel, 2013; Cappadocia et al., 2013; Cassidy et al., 2009; Holfeld & Leadbeater, 2015; Li, 2006; Law, Shapka, Domene et al., 2012; Mishna et al., 2010; Mishna et al., 2012).

With regards to the Holfeld and Leadbeater (2015) study, using a survey of fifth and sixth grade students, they examined the occurrence of behaviours of cyberbullying (both as perpetrator and victim) at the beginning (T1) ($n=714$) and end (T2) ($n=638$) of the school year. An example of perpetrating behaviour included *have you posted or shared a picture of someone that they would not want everyone to see*; while the experience of victimization included *has anyone posted or shared a message or picture about you online that you did not want everyone to see*. They discovered overall rates of cyberbullying perpetration of 10.2% at T1 and 13% at T2 (Holfeld & Leadbeater, 2015). The most common behaviours that both grade five and six

students engaged in were posting something online about someone to make others laugh (T1 = 8.1% and T2 = 9.6% respectively). One possible reason why boys may engage in this type of behaviour more frequently than girls is they are trying to make others laugh through jokes rather than focusing on trying to harm another person (Holfeld & Leadbeater, 2015). Children often find it difficult to differentiate joking behaviours from cyberbullying (Ackers, 2012). Although boys were more likely to engage in joking types of behaviours, the results did not reach a level of significance in the Holfeld and Leadbeater study (2015). With respect to other behaviours such as starting rumours, the occurrences were rare (T1 = 0.6% and T2 = 1.7% respectively) (Holfeld & Leadbeater, 2015). In terms of victimization, the same study identified that overall, 22% of students reported being victimized at the beginning of the year and approximately 27% reported incidences at the end of the year. The most common experiences reported included *were received a text message that made you upset or uncomfortable* and *someone posted something on your online page or wall that made you upset or uncomfortable*. Furthermore, girls were more likely to report cyber victimization than boys (25.1% vs. 18.5% at T1 and 33.1% vs. 19.9% at T2). These results were marginally significant at T1 and were moderately significant at T2.

Another Canadian study by Mishna and colleagues (2012) also investigated the prevalence of cyberbullying through the use of surveys. Their sample of 2,186 middle and high school students was divided into four groups: victims, bullies, bully-victims, and those students who were not involved in cyberbullying in any respect. The authors discovered that over 50% of all students surveyed self-identified as being associated with cyberbullying in some capacity. It was reported that 23.8% reported being victimized, 8% reported that they had been a perpetrator, and 25.7% identified as being both a victim and a perpetrator of cyberbullying.

An additional influential Canadian study conducted by Beran and colleagues, (2015)

investigated the prevalence rates of cyberbullying and victimization, as well as the impact of cyberbullying, on over 1000 adolescents (age 10-17) across Canada (excluding the territories), using an online survey. They discovered the vast majority of students were not involved in cyberbullying (74%), but for those who were, approximately 14% of students reported being cyberbullied once, twice or more in the last month, while only roughly 8% reported cyberbullying others within the same time frame.

One unpublished study of 476 students (46.6% male and 53.4% female) in grades 10 to 12 in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan examined the prevalence of cyberbullying and victimization, the use of technology, which technologies are used most in cyberbullying, and the impact of cyberbullying on adolescents (Pisch, 2010). The author discovered that while the majority of students were not involved in cyberbullying in any way (victim, perpetrator, both, or witness), 44% reported that they had been cyberbullied at least once in their lives, and 31.3% reported having cyberbullied someone at least once. Results also suggested the most common ways adolescents cyberbullied others was through Instant Messaging (IM), cell phones, email, chat rooms, social networking sites (such as Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter), and 'other means' which were predominantly identified by respondents as gaming online. From the 23 participants who indicated 'other means', 18 (78%) indicated that the mode of cyberbullying was through online gaming. Unfortunately, those 18 students were not identified by gender. Although Pisch's research did not identify online gaming as one of the primary means of cyberbullying, it is important to explore this line of research because approximately 71% of adolescent boys in Canada engage in online gaming as their primary way of communicating with each other online (Steeves, 2015).

The Impact of Cyberbullying

It is not just important to understand what cyberbullying is and its prevalence, but more importantly the impact cyberbullying can have on its victims. In recent years, a plethora of research has examined the impact cyberbullying has on the academic, psychological, emotional, and social well-being adolescents and young adults (Bauman, Toomey, & Walker, 2013; Beran et al., 2015; Bottino, Bottino, Regina, Correia, & Ribeiro, 2015; Campbell et al., 2012; Cénat et al., 2014; Cross, Lester, & Barnes, 2015; Dempsey, Sulkowski, Nichols, & Storch, 2009; Fryling et al., 2015; Gamez-Guadix, Orue, & Smith, 2013; Kowalski et al., 2008; Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Kubiszewski, Fontaine, Potard, & Auzoult, 2015; Li, 2005; Li & Pustaka, 2017; McInroy & Mishna, 2017; Mishna et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2008; Tokunaga, 2010; Walker et al., 2014).

Kowalski and Limber (2013) examined the academic, psychological, and emotional consequences of both traditional and cyberbullying using questionnaires in two Pennsylvania schools ($n=931$), grades six through twelve. They discovered that although the vast majority of participants were not engaged in cyberbullying behaviours or victimization (77%), those who were victims of cyberbullying had higher rates of low grades, lack of concentration, and absenteeism. These consequences are believed to be related to obsessing, worrying and thinking about cyberbullying, which in turn increased the rates of absenteeism. The authors also discovered that these results were consistent with traditional bullying victims. Additionally, Tokunaga's 2010 meta-synthesis of 25 cyberbullying studies concluded that victims of cyberbullying also show higher rates of detentions and suspensions, stronger feelings of school no longer feeling safe, and an increase in problems in their home lives. These results were further supported by Bottino and colleagues' 2015 systemic review of 10 studies.

Not only do students' academics suffer as a result of cyberbullying, but so does the

emotional and psychological well-being of the victims. Victims of cyberbullying report increased levels of anger, sadness, depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. Self-esteem issues, lack of locus of control, relationship difficulties and suicidal behaviour have also been found (Bauman, Underwood et al., 2013; Beran et al., 2015; Bottino et al., 2015; Cénat, et al., 2014; Fredstrom, Adams, & Gilman, 2011; Gamez-Guadix et al., 2013; Kowalski & Limber, 2010; Mishna et al., 2010; Tokunaga, 2010). One such study by Fredstrom and colleagues (2011), examined the impact of school bullying and cyberbullying (through phone and/or computer based) on six psychosocial and psychological adjustment factors. These factors were self-esteem, social stress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, locus of control, and self-efficacy. The researchers also examined if phone or computer based modes of cyberbullying affected psychosocial adjustments differently. The sample included 802 American ninth graders (mean age = 15.84 years) from four high schools from one region in a southeastern state. Results indicated that while the majority of students did not report being school bullied or cyberbullied (72.9% and 75.3% respectively), those students who did report being victimized through cyberbullying had associated maladjustment measures on five psychosocial factors when school victimization was controlled. Students reported lower levels of self-esteem and higher levels of social stress, anxiousness, depression, and locus of control.

Within Canada, similar results were found with respect to the emotional impact cyberbullying had on victims. Cénat et al. (2014) discovered that Quebec students who experienced cyberbullying had low levels of self-esteem and higher levels of psychological distress. One unpublished Saskatchewan study conducted by Andrie (2013), discovered that the most common emotions students reported after being victimized included feelings of sadness, being scared, feeling alone, vulnerable, frustrated, nervous, pathetic, powerless, and depressed.

In terms of behaviours, students reported feeling sick, wanting to run away, trouble sleeping, not wanting to attend school, and difficulties concentrating. Similarly, Pisch (2010) found that Saskatchewan students reported feeling afraid, anxious, hurt, sad and embarrassed when cyberbullied. Prevalence rates and the impact of cyberbullying may also differ partially, due to how boys and girls are socialized.

Gender Differences in Cyberbullying

One concern that researchers have investigated is whether there are gender differences in cyberbullying, the same way there are in traditional bullying. Research has confirmed that boys are more likely to participate in and be victims of traditional bullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2008; Law, Shapka, Domene et al., 2012). According to Tokunaga's 2010 meta-synthesis, earlier research that examined gender differences in cyberbullying were inconclusive. He discovered that of the 25 studies reviewed, 15 did not show significant gender differences in cyberbullying victimization. He notes, however, that females were not proportionately represented in the studies that did show significant gender differences (Tokunaga, 2010). More recent literature seems to indicate that females rather than males are just as likely, if not more likely, to be both cyberbullied and perpetrators. When Hinduja and Patchin (2015) analyzed the cyberbullying prevalence rate across 24 studies, females were more likely to be cyberbullying victims than males in 18 of those studies (average of 22% compared to 18% respectively). They also reported that out of the six studies in which boys were cyberbullied more often, not all findings were statistically significant (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015).

One reason boys and girls vary in terms of bullying and cyberbullying behaviours may be due to specific goals. Boys typically have more dominance-oriented goals (Engerman, 2016). They are more inclined to use direct or overt forms of aggression. Behaviours such as physical

violence or verbal threats commonly associated with traditional bullying are typically identified with males (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Mayer, 2008; Prinstein, Boergers & Vernberg, 2001; Varjas, Henrich & Meyers, 2009). One study conducted by Nansel and colleagues (2001) examined bullying behaviour and its impact on 15,686 students from grade 6 to 10 throughout the United States. With regards to gender differences they discovered more males than females were victims of physical bullying (66.1% versus 43.9%). Conversely, girls were more likely than boys to engage in indirect and relational bullying such as starting rumors (65.3% versus 55%), making sexual comments and/or gestures (57.2% versus 47.3%) or other forms of relational aggression (Nansel et al., 2001).

Due to the nature of cyberbullying being predominantly indirect, and since many of the methods (aside from verbal threats) are relational, such as rumour spreading, gossiping, and posting videos/photos, or other ways to damage relationships, it is possible to theorize that cyberbullying perpetration and victimization may be more common with girls than boys (Connell et al., 2014; Fryling et al., 2015; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). One study conducted by Connell and colleagues in 2014 investigated whether more females than males are engaged in more cyberbullying behaviours and are victims of cyberbullying. In their sample of 3,867 students in grades five to eight from 14 schools in the Northeastern United States, using a questionnaire method, discovered that while both males and females experienced similar rates of any form of bullying or victimization, the types of behaviours did significantly vary by gender. They identified physical bullying was more common for boys than girls (30.3% versus 22.4%) and boys were victimized more frequently than girls (40.6% versus 22.7%). They also found out that girls were more likely than boys to be both perpetrators (16% versus 10.5%) and victims of cyberbullying (30.1% versus 17.9%). With regards to relational bullying behaviours, there were

no significant gender differences. These results indicated that girls are more likely to use cyberbullying to hurt others and that they report more incidents of relational victimization than boys (61.6% versus 57.8%).

There are many hypotheses as to why girls may be more likely to engage in and be victims of cyberbullying. In terms of the types of technology used for cyberbullying, girls tend to use social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), text messaging and chat rooms to cyberbully (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2008). Boys on the other hand, primarily cyberbully using online gaming (through PC, Xbox, and PlayStation) by sending hurtful messages through text or chatting. Other methods of cyberbullying with boys include email, and text messaging (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2008; Pisch, 2010).

Gender differences in cyberbullying reporting may partially be due to gender socialization. Boys may not report cyberbullying as frequently because they may not consider their experiences as cyberbullying per se but as a normal part of growing up or a rite of passage (Andrie, 2013; Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Pisch, 2010). For instance, when Andrie (2013) conducted her thesis on cyberbullying in Saskatchewan, Canada, and asked if *cyberbullying was a normal part of the online world*, males were more likely to agree with the statement than girls (46.2% compared to 38.5%). These results were statistically significant.

While most adolescents do not report cyberbullying to adults, Hinduja and Patchin (2015) did discover in their research that girls had a higher rate of reporting than boys. This was further supported by other researchers (Campbell et al., 2012; Connell et al., 2014; Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Kowalski et al., 2014; Mishna, et al., 2012; Schneider et al., 2012; Tokunaga, 2010). According to Hinduja and Patchin (2015), girls may be more likely than boys to report cyberbullying experiences because they internalize the

hurtful messages more often than boys. They posit that this notion is due to the nature of cyberbullying, as opposed to traditional bullying, which is typically very direct and physical, cyberbullying is much more associated with psychological and emotional harm (Connell et al., 2014; Fryling et al., 2015).

Gender Socialization

Given all we know about the gender differences in the way bullying occurs, the question remains - how are boys experiencing cyberbullying? More specifically, are there specific reasons why boys are not engaging in cyberbullying as frequently as girls, or are there reasons they are not reporting it as much? For some answers it is important to first examine how boys tend to be socialized. Gender socialization states that boys and girls behave differently because of the gender roles they are supposed to follow (Cohen, 2001a; 2001b). From an early age boys are often socialized to engage in aggressive sports, competition, horseplay, and other 'typically male' social activities, while girls are stereotypically socialized into non-aggressive, less confrontational face-to-face activities that focus on relationship building (Cohen, 2001a; Cohen, 2001b; Iman, 1996; Swain, 1989). Research has supported the notion that boys and girls build and maintain friendships differently (Fehr, 1996; Inman, 1996; Pollock, 2001; Swain, 1989). Often boys and girls achieve the same level of intimacy in friendships but do so through different means. Girls tend to form friendships through self-disclosure and face-to-face interactions while boys build and maintain friendships through 'side-by-side' interactions, also referred to as 'closeness in doing' (Inman, 1996; McDiarmid et al., 2016; Swain, 1989; Walker, 1994). Coined by Swain (1989), he believed men showed caring and affection for one another through activities such as playing sports, watching sports, fishing, hunting, and other activities.

McNelles and Connolly (1999) examined the relationship between three behaviours associated with intimacy amongst adolescents (grades 9-11): (a) activity-centered intimacy; (b) discussion of topics; and (c) self-disclosure. They discovered that although boys and girls did not differ in terms of the amount of intimacy they exhibited, they did show significant differences in behaviours. Boys had a tendency to score higher than girls on activity-centered intimacy while girls scored higher than boys on both topics of conversation and self-disclosure.

It is not uncommon for males to express positive feelings for their friends through teasing, mockery and insults (Barnett, Burns, Sanborn, Bartel, & Wilds, 2004; Beck et al., 2007; Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 2006; McDiarmid, et al., 2016; Slaatten, Anderssen, & Hetland, 2014). Trash-talking defined as “disparaging, taunting, or boastful comments especially between opponents trying to intimidate each other” (Merriam-Webster, 2016) is often a method of connection used in sports and gaming amongst men (Lenhart et al., 2015). Some of the most common reasons for teasing and insults are for fun, to bond with others and to cheer others up. Teasing for the purpose of dominance, retribution and for annoyance purposes was rarely reported (Beck et al., 2007; Keltner et al., 2001). Lampert and Ervin-Tripp (2006) revealed that men were more likely to tease other men when in same-sex groups than they were when they were in mixed-gender groups. In mixed groups when women would tease men, the men would have a tendency to laugh it off and not tease back due to societal norms dictating that they should not tease women as it may appear more aggressive than playful (Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 2006). Boys and men appear to enjoy teasing and being teased more than women (Barnett et al., 2004; Beck et al., 2007). These behaviours, while appearing negative, in the male culture are not perceived as bullying but actually forms of affection (Barnett et al., 2004; Beck et al., 2007; Keltner et al., 2001; Kowalski et al., 2008; Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 2006; McDiarmid et al.,

2016; Slaatten et al., 2014). In fact, it is not uncommon for friends to use derogatory and gay-related terms such as 'queer' to convey affection towards each other (Slaatten et al., 2014). In Slaatten and colleagues' (2014) research they identified that boys were over five times more likely to call another boy a gay-related name than girls. Furthermore, 54% of boys called their friends (whom they knew were not gay) gay-related names, compared to 30% of females (Slaatten et al., 2014). To ensure that these results were associated more with friendships rather than with bullying, the authors investigated the frequency of boys and girls calling someone who is homosexual gay-related names. Their results indicated that approximately 80% of students never called someone who they thought was gay a gay-related name (Slaatten et al., 2014).

Teasing others has also been used to convey that they have broken social norms. For instance, as children, a boy may be teased for playing with the opposite sex or for not following the rules of a game (Keltner et al., 2001). Males have been socialized that overt expressions of emotion may convey feminine traits such as softness, warmth, and cooperation (Connell, 2005; Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 2006; McDiarmid et al., 2016). Insulting one another can save face for men as they can appear tough, macho, and competitive, while still acknowledging closeness (Beck et al., 2007; Keltner et al., 2001; McDiarmid et al., 2016).

While playing sports *trash-talking* or *talking smack* with peers and rivals is not just encouraged but considered a rite of passage (Beck et al., 2005; LoConto & Roth, 2005; Messner, 2006; Pelfrey & Webber, 2014). Males are socialized to give and brush off insults and trash-talk as a way of proving that they are masculine, while expecting others to do the same (Beck et al., 2005; Kowalski, 2000; Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 2006; McDiarmid et al., 2016; Slaatten et al., 2014). Teasing and insults occur more often with boys and men than women because it is believed that humour and being witty, which is a major factor in teasing, is more imbedded in the

socialization of masculinity than it is in femininity (Beck et al., 2007). These behaviours enhance bonding and friendship formation (Barnett et al., 2004; Beck et al., 2007; Keltner, et al., 2001; McDiarmid, et al., 2016).

Given that boys are often socialized to develop a “thick skin” at an early age and are expected to be seen as tough, macho, and to exhibit bravado, boys may view bullying and cyberbullying as a normal part of growing up and as such may not report cyberbullying (Andrie, 2013). In sports culture trash-talking is not only acceptable but also encouraged. Due to sports culture trash-talking is not considered bullying or harassment, it is actually considered a healthy form of competition (Engerman, 2016). Although appearing harsh to an outsider the goal of trash-talking is not to inflict harm, but to get into an opponent’s head so that they lose. Being that videogames are often just as competitive as sports (especially when those games are sports related), it is not hard to transfer those same *male* behaviours into the online gaming world (Engerman, 2016; Morales et al., 2016).

Another reason why boys may not report cyberbullying as frequently as girls is that boys may be more willing to confront their assailant to inquire about the incident. This may be due to boys’ socialization of being more confrontational toward each other. This gender socialization leads to girls engaging in social media with their friends and using these platforms where they feel most comfortable to harass others (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). Given that communication technology provides the ideal situation for groups to gang up on others, especially through social media sites, it makes sense that girls would engage in more cyberbullying behaviour and be victimized by it (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2008).

Friendship Formation in an Online World

Friendships are an integral part of life for children and adolescents. With the advent of the internet and social media, the way in which teenagers make friends has changed (Di Gennaro & Dutton, 2007; Trepte, Reinnecke, & Juechems, 2012). Early studies examining the internet and friendships indicated that friendships decreased with more internet use as a result of anonymity, lack of social cues and lower social presence (Blais et al., 2008; Kraut et al., 1998). However, as technology and the understanding of it has increased, the internet has been shown to become a powerful tool for the formation and maintenance of friendships (Di Gennaro & Dutton, 2007). Results from the Pew Internet Survey showed that 83% of teens reported that the use of social media helped them feel closer and more connected with their friends (Lenhart et al., 2015). The internet and technology have also provided adolescents with the opportunity to develop friendships with peers having similar interests from around the world. For example, if a teenager was the only one in his group of friends who liked comic books, he or she would be able to find an online community with similar interests (Di Gennaro & Dutton, 2007; Engerman, 2016).

With respect to social development, research has shown that the internet has helped adolescents overcome shyness whereby they are able to better communicate with friends via chat rooms than they would have if they were in face-to-face interactions (Mishna, McLuckie et al., 2009; Peter et al., 2005; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). Peter and colleagues (2005) discovered that shy teenagers felt more comfortable self-disclosing online which created stronger friendships and bonds. Finally, the internet can also provide adolescents with a venue for self-exploration and for trying out different identities (or selves). This practice of ‘finding themselves’ is not uncommon in adolescence (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). Finding themselves online may be useful because some personal characteristics may not be acceptable or may have negative consequences in their

real world (Cole & Griffiths, 2007). Adolescents can choose who they want to be online. For example, the adolescent can choose to be gay or straight, male or female, or play any number of roles they can think of (Kowalski et al., 2008). With regards to maintaining friendships, text messaging is the most common way friends interact (Lenhart et al., 2015). Additionally, 62% of girls spend time with friends and talk daily through text messaging, compared to 48% of boys. In a similar fashion, boys spend time and communicate with each other through videogames (74% compared to 31% of girls). The reasons for these interactions for boys include conversations, collaboration (such as strategies on how to complete a mission), and trash-talking (Lenhart et al. 2015).

Blias and colleagues (2008) discovered that while internet messaging was used to increase the quality of relationships amongst best friends and romantic partners, online gaming reduced it. However, their definition of online gaming was playing computer games alone but connected to the internet. This is counter to what most describe as online gaming, which involves playing and interacting (voice or chat) with other people (Axelsson & Regan, 2006; Ballard & Welch, 2017; Chan & Vorderer, 2006; Fryling et al., 2015; Granic et al., 2014; Klug & Schell, 2006; Leung & McBride-Chang, 2013; McInroy & Mishna, 2017; Trepte et al., 2012).

According to a survey conducted by Lenhart and colleagues (2015) approximately 57% of adolescents make friends online. The notion that males make more friends online is supported by a number of other researchers (Engerman, 2016; Di Gennaro & Dutton, 2007; Leung & McBride-Chang, 2013; Peter et al., 2005). The most common ways of meeting friends online include Facebook and other social media sites (64%), followed by video games (36%). There also seems to be a significant gender difference in meeting friends online, whereby 61% of boys compared to 52% of girls make online friends. Furthermore, girls typically meet and maintain

friends through social media (78% compared to 52% of boys), while boys primarily meet new friends through online gaming (57% compared to 13% of girls). Teens report that by playing online games friendships are more likely to form (Lenhart et al., 2015). While playing video games online, 84% of boys report that they feel closer and more connected with their friends, compared to 62% of girls gaming online (Lenhart et al., 2015). Boys are even more likely to feel connected to people they consider non-friends while online gaming (Lenhart et al., 2015).

Playing video games is the most common and preferred way for boys to engage in day-to-day interactions with friends outside of school, whether it be in the same room or online. Forty-two percent of adolescent boys aged 13-17 years reported playing video games offline in the same room together at least on a weekly basis, while 55% percent of teen boys reported participating in online gaming with their friends in separate locations on a weekly basis (Engerman, 2016; Lenhart et al., 2015). Furthermore, approximately 52% of teens engage in gaming with friends; 83% offline and 75% online. Although the media and society frequently portray video games as a cause of violent teens, research has shown that gaming improves social networks, bonding, friendship formation, comradery, social support, identity formation, and self-awareness (Cade & Gates, 2017; Engerman, 2016).

Gaming and Cyberbullying

Since boys are often more inclined to engage in aggressive, competitive games, many children and adolescents report that playing violent video games involving sports, fighting, and action is a way to compete without the physical component (Disalvo, Crowley, & Norwood, 2008; Engerman, 2016). Considering that children and adolescent boys enjoy playing violent video games, the media and society have come to believe that videogames play a factor in violence. Research on the other hand, is inconclusive. While some researchers have found that

videogames may develop hostility and aggression, others have not. For example, Ferguson and Olson (2014), investigated the role of violent video games and aggression amongst delinquent students and those with attention difficulties. Results indicated no correlation between increased violent behaviour and video games. In their study, students reported that they understand that the game is not real and that they are just having fun. Violent video games are not an uncommon part of growing up for boys. For instance, first person shooter games such as Call of Duty, have become the online version of playing tag (Engerman, 2016). Violent video games have been said to allow boys to explore their aggressiveness in safe and controlled environments (Engerman, 2016).

Although Pisch's (2010) and Ackers' (2012) research did not identify online gaming as one of the primary means of cyberbullying, it is important to explore this line of research because approximately 71% of adolescent boys in Canada engage in online gaming and indicate that this is their primary way of communicating with each other online (Steeves, 2015). To date, very little research has been conducted specifically on gaming and cyberbullying (Ballard & Welch, 2017; Frying et al., 2015; Li & Pustaka, 2017; McInroy & Mishna, 2017). All studies except for one (McInroy & Mishna, 2017) have used adults in their samples and some research indicates that 68% of online gamers are adults with the average age of 35 years (Entertainment Software Association, 2016).

Cyberbullying prevalence rates in gaming environments vary. When Li and Puskata (2017) examined the prevalence rates and experiences of cyberbullying and gaming amongst 357 university students, they discovered that over 57% reported being cyberbullied while gaming. They also identified that approximately 51% of participants reported cyberbullying others while gaming online. Furthermore, 70% of young adults reported that they have witnessed

cyberbullying while online gaming. Similarly, another study with adults reported that 38% of respondents avoided participating in multi-player games for fear of cyberbullying and 54% have left a game due to cyberbullying (Fryling et al., 2015). In addition, approximately 64% of participants either *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that cyberbullying in gaming was a serious problem in gaming. Both these studies appear to have identified a relatively high percentage of cyberbullying in gaming situations in comparison to other researchers who have examined the issue and found much lower prevalence rates between 10 to 40% (Kowalski et al., 2014; Tokunaga, 2010). One reason for this discrepancy might be that 64% of Fryling and colleagues' (2015) study participants were females. Research has also shown that females typically report cyberbullying more than men (Connell et al., 2014; Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). In spite of the high rates of cyberbullying in gaming, many participants agreed that gaming did not promote cyberbullying (Ballard & Welch, 2017; Fryling et al., 2015; Li & Pustaka, 2017; McInroy & Mishna, 2017). This finding supports other research that videogames do not correlate with violent teen behaviours (Ferguson & Olson, 2014).

Research has also identified various genres where cyberbullying is believed to take place. Over 93% of participants believe that cyberbullying occurs most often in action games. This was followed by role playing games (66%) and sports games (52%) (Li & Pustaka, 2017). Unless first person shooter games were included in the category of action games, it is surprising that this genre was not included considering most gamers play this type of game (Hartmann & Kilmmt, 2006). Students have also identified that the main motive for cyberbullying in online gaming was to maintain rank in the game, as well as making sure new players understood that they were at the bottom (Ballard & Welch, 2017).

McInroy and Mishna (2017) investigated, through quantitative surveys, the prevalence rates of cyberbullying and gaming as well as the types of online platforms used. The survey included 670 students from 4th ($n=160$), 7th ($n=243$) and 10th grades ($n=267$), with ages ranging from 8-16 ($\bar{x} = 12.63$). The study involved 19 different schools in Toronto, Ontario and participants were from various ethnicities, races, SES, and gender. The authors indicated that approximately 44% of students played games on online platforms and that 84.1% used a PC to play online games at least sometimes. They also identified that 52.6% of students went online through gaming platforms and 89.5% did so at least at some point. One area that McInroy and Mishna did not identify was of the percentage of students engaged in each gaming platform as well as what constitutes 'at least sometimes' or 'at least at some point' (2017). With respect to gender, McInroy and Mishna (2017) discovered that more boys than girls played games online' although statistically significant, this difference was relatively small (50.9% compared to 38.5%). Overall rates of cyberbullying (as victim, perpetrator, and/or witness) among the three online gaming platforms were low, but most participants reported being witnesses to cyberbullying. The highest rates were with MMOGs (massive multiplayer online games) at 3.3%, followed by gaming consoles at 3%, and finally virtual worlds (such as Second Life, or The Sims) at 2.1%. Additionally, rates of victimization were even lower, at around 1%, in virtual worlds. One area of the research that needing further clarification is the difference between MMOG's and Virtual Worlds, due to the fact that these terms are often used synonymously, confounding study results (Chan & Vorderer, 2006).

The only study to include a qualitative portion was McInroy and Mishna's (2017) study which investigated adolescents' experience and impact of cyberbullying and gaming. It employed in-person (year 1 with 57 participants) and follow-up phone interviews (year 3 with 31

participants) on cyberbullying and gaming. The authors discovered that what is typically defined and understood as cyberbullying is not part of the subculture of online gaming. Many youths described their own and others' aggressive behaviours as a normal part of the online gaming experience.

McInroy and Mishna (2017) identified a number of themes related to online gaming. The first, aggressive behaviours excessive to the game were frequent and although defined by researchers as cyberbullying, the players did not see them as such. The gamers even identified that swearing, insults, and trash-talking were ubiquitous in gaming culture. According to Ballard and Welch (2017) some of the most common ways of being victimized on MMOGs included: name calling (52%); use of profanity (50%); being called names with a sexual meaning (48%); exclusion (20%); and being kicked out of the game (11%).

Griefers, a separate group of bullies, try to ruin the game for everyone by deliberately harassing and irritating other players in the game. Some examples of griefing include ruining the progress of another player, deliberately killing fellow team members in first person shooters, or flooding a player's voice or chat to annoy them (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2008). Hazing, is yet another way aggressive behaviour occurs in gaming where participants repeatedly kill a new player in a game countless times to newcomers. McInroy and Mishna (2017) suggest that future researchers focus on the behaviour of players rather than ask players directly about cyberbullying. They also suggest that asking participants directly about cyberbullying may have impacted the quantitative results that they and others have found in that possibly participants reported low levels of cyberbullying in gaming because they did not identify their behaviour as cyberbullying. A second theme, anonymity, emerged in their findings. Players indicated that aggressive anonymous behaviours were part of the gaming culture. Some

gamers even felt encouraged to behave aggressively as the “platform culture permitted or encouraged such actions” (McInroy & Mishna, 2017, p.263). However, these aggressive behaviours may have negative impacts on players, even though participants stated that it is part of gaming culture and that they did not take aggressive acts personally. Studies such as Ballard and Welch, (2017), Li and Puskata, (2017), and Fryling and colleagues, (2015) may have higher rates of cyberbullying due to specific behaviours being classified as cyberbullying or that these authors previously defined cyberbullying a specific way and thus the responses from their participants were compelled to report the behaviour as such without the opportunity to describe if they (the participants) thought these behaviours were considered cyberbullying.

McInroy and Mishna (2017) identify a number of areas as requiring further study. One is that overly aggressive behaviour while gaming simulating physical bullying is not well understood. Another area is the impact of anonymity on gamers. In previous research students state that anonymity makes cyberbullying worse; however this is not well studied in gaming. Another area McInroy and Mishna (2017) identified as requiring further research relates to the escapism experienced by gamers. For instance, if a student is bullied or cyberbullied they may use gaming as a way to relax and release anger and frustration. Finally, the risks and benefits of gaming are not well understood, particularly given that gamers did not define their and co-gamers’ aggressive behaviours as cyberbullying.

Qualitative Research in Cyberbullying

One issue regarding cyberbullying has been the paradigm in which most research to date has been conducted (Mishna & Van Wert, 2013). Most research studies on this subject use positivist paradigms employing surveys and questionnaires (e.g., Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Holfeld & Leadbeater, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2014; Law, Shapka, Domene et al., 2012; Menesini

et al., 2013; Pieschl et al., 2015; Pieschl et al., 2013). Qualitative research, especially the use of focus groups and interviews, may provide in-depth information about the meanings, experiences and views of cyberbullying that may not be captured through quantitative measures (Espinoza & Juvonen, 2013). Qualitative research provides the opportunity for researchers to take a step back in order to better define and gain a better understanding of cyberbullying, and derive meaning from the experiences of individuals (Mishna & Van Wert, 2013). The qualitative research that has been conducted on cyberbullying falls into the following categories: definitions of cyberbullying (Ackers, 2012; Baas et al., 2013; Compton et al., 2014; McInroy & Mishna, 2017; Mishna, Sinai et al., 2009; Naruskov et al., 2012; Navarro & Serna, 2016; Nocentini et al., 2010; Rafferty & Vander-Ven, 2014; Smith et al., 2008; Spears et al., 2009; Vanderbosch & Van Cleemput, 2008); understanding, perceptions and perspectives of cyberbullying (Ackers, 2012; Allen, 2012; Baas et al., 2013; Cassidy et al., 2012; Compton et al., 2014; Maher, 2008; Mishna, McLuckie et al., 2009; Navarro & Serna, 2016; Naruskov et al., 2012; Paul et al., 2012; Vanderbosch & Van Cleemput, 2008); experiences and impact of cyberbullying (Ackers, 2012; Agaston et al., 2007; Baas et al., 2013; Bryce & Fraser, 2013; Frisen et al., 2014; Kofoed & Ringrose, 2012; McInroy & Mishna, 2017; Maher, 2008; Mishna, McLuckie et al., 2009; Mishna, Sinai et al., 2009; Pelfrey & Weber, 2014; Raferty & Ven, 2014; Spears et al., 2009) and coping strategies and interventions for cyberbullying (Ackers, 2012; Agaston et al., 2007; Allen, 2012; Baas et al., 2013; Bryce & Fraser, 2013; Frisen et al., 2014; Grigg, 2010; Maher, 2008; Mishna, McLuckie et al., 2009; Mishna, Sinai, et al., 2009; Parris et al., 2012; Paul et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2008; Spears, et al., 2009). **The current qualitative research on cyberbullying is reviewed in Appendix A.** Many researchers have examined cyberbullying, however the definitions used have varied (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Holfeld & Leadbeater, 2015; Kowalski et

al., 2014; Law, Shapka, Domene et al., 2012; Menesini et al., 2013; Pieschl et al., 2015; Pieschl et al., 2013). As a result, it has been difficult to compare studies. Qualitative researchers have taken on the task of exploring adolescent and adult experiences of cyberbullying to develop a more grassroots definition. Researchers who have examined how individuals define cyberbullying have identified a number of major themes. The most common theme is that the definition of cyberbullying has not been consistent which creates problems for people (researchers, adults, and youth) in understanding cyberbullying. These difficulties often involve the criteria used in defining cyberbullying and the behaviours involved such as power imbalance, intent to harm, anonymity, repetition, motivation, and the issue of covert and overt behaviours (e.g., Compton et al., 2014; Grigg, 2010; Mishna, Sinai, et al., 2009; Naruskov et al., 2012; Navarro & Serna, 2016; Nocentini et al., 2010; Paul et al., 2012; Pelfrey & Weber, 2014; Raferty & Ven, 2014; Spears et al., 2009; Vanderbosch & Van Cleemput, 2008).

Another emerging theme researchers have discovered is that the term/words/language used to refer to cyberbullying can change how students define cyberbullying (Grigg, 2010, Naruskov et al., 2012; Nocentini et al., 2010). In one study, Naruskov and colleagues (2012) discovered that the different terms and criteria for cyberbullying created many disagreements amongst the participants as to what constitutes cyberbullying. For example, in their study, some students believed that if the cyberbullying was anonymous, the impact should be considered less severe than if the victim knew their perpetrator. On the other hand, other students believed cyberbullying was more severe when the victim did not know where the attack was coming from (Naruskov et al., 2012). Another theme that emerged was that as technology changes, so too will the definition of cyberbullying (Bryce & Fraser, 2013; Paul et al., 2012). The last major theme that emerged from qualitative research on defining cyberbullying was that many students

identified that cyberbullying was independent from traditional bullying (Baas et al., 2013; Bryce & Fraser, 2013; Mishna, Sinai, et al., 2009; Pelfrey & Weber, 2014). McInroy and Mishna (2017) found that gaming youth often did not define aggressive behaviours as cyberbullying, instead seeing it as part of the gaming culture. The results of qualitative research have been consistent with quantitative studies in that finding a cohesive definition of cyberbullying has been difficult.

How individuals define cyberbullying can also impact how they come to understand, perceive and view cyberbullying. One study that examined the views of teachers, parents and students on what constitutes cyberbullying discovered that there were differences between the groups with regards to the various criteria used to define cyberbullying (Compton et al., 2014). Research in this area has been conducted primarily through focus groups and interviews. Through qualitative research, various themes have been developed on how youth, adolescents, and adults have come to understand, perceive and view cyberbullying (e.g., Ackers, 2012; Allen, 2012; Baas et al., 2013; Cassidy et al., 2012; Compton et al., 2014; Maher, 2008; Mishna, McLuckie et al., 2009; Navarro & Serna, 2016; Naruskov et al., 2012; Paul et al., 2012; Vanderbosch & Van Cleemput, 2008). The first theme that arose in the qualitative studies suggested that most students, educators and parents have an understanding of what constitutes cyberbullying but do not believe it occurs often, especially in the school setting (Cassidy et al., 2012; Compton et al., 2014). However, students report that cyberbullying is frequently done in secret away from adult supervision (Allen, 2012; Ackers, 2012; Cassidy et al., 2012, Compton et al., 2014). Another theme that emerged was that students, more than adults, understood the use of technology and how it can be used to cyberbully others (Allen, 2012, Baas et al., 2013; Bryce & Fraser, 2013; Grigg, 2010; Mishna, McLuckie et al., 2009). The last major theme to emerge

was that depending on how cyberbullying was defined, different groups had different understandings of what cyberbullying is (Ackers, 2012; Allen, 2012; Compton et al., 2014; Grigg, 2010; Maher, 2008; Mishna, Sinai et al., 2009; Nauskov, et al., 2012; Nocentini et al., 2010; Paul et al., 2012; Pelfrey & Weber, 2014; Spears et al., 2009; Vanderbosch & Van Cleemput, 2008). McInroy and Mishna (2017) caution using the term cyberbullying when interviewing gamers as gamers frequently do not see their own or others' aggressive behaviours as cyberbullying, despite these behaviours being defined as such by researchers.

Although the motivation behind cyberbullying has been investigated through quantitative research (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Mishna, et al., 2012; Vazsonyi, et al., 2012; Wolke et al., 2016), there have been a few qualitative studies that sought to gain a better understanding of the motivations behind cyberbullying (e.g., Law, Shapka, Domene et al., 2012; Rafferty & Ven, 2014; Smith et al., 2008). These researchers discovered some common themes from children and adolescents on the motivations behind cyberbullying. A number of researchers discovered that many students believed cyberbullies committed the acts as a form of entertainment, either for themselves (out of boredom) or to make others laugh (Law, Shapka, Domene et al., 2012; Rafferty & Ven, 2014; Smith et al., 2008). Another theme that emerged was that if adolescents engaged in cyberbullying behaviours, it was in retaliation to being bullied or cyberbullied themselves and as a result they considered it reactive and justified. On the other hand, when cyberbullied themselves, victims viewed that the aggressors were the proactive perpetrators (Law, Shapka, Domene et al., 2012; Rafferty & Ven, 2014). Based on how youth define cyberbullying, understand it, and the motivation behind it, their experiences and the impact cyberbullying has on them may vary as well.

Another theme to emerge was how students and educators cope with cyberbullying and

possible interventions for dealing with it (e.g., Ackers, 2012; Agaston et al., 2007; Allen, 2012; Baas et al., 2013; Bryce & Fraser, 2013; Frisen et al., 2014; Grigg, 2010; Maher, 2008; Mishna, McLuckie et al., 2009; Mishna, Sinai et al., 2009; Parris, et al., 2012; Paul et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2008; Spears, et al., 2009). Although students report cyberbullying as pervasive, they claim that it is not regularly discussed in school and that when it is discussed teachers and educators are not well equipped to handle the topic (Ackers, 2012; Agaston et al., 2007; Cassidy et al., 2012). The need for interventions particularly with respect to educating and training school personnel and parents in the use of technology and cyberbullying behaviour emerged as a theme (Agaston et al., 2007; Andrie, 2013; Cassidy et al., 2012; Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Navarro & Serna, 2016; Parris et al., 2012; Pisch, 2010).

The last major theme that emerged from qualitative studies was how to gain a more in-depth understanding of how children and adolescents experience cyberbullying and the impact it has on them through the use of focus groups and interviews (Ackers, 2012; Agaston et al., 2007; Baas et al., 2013; Bryce & Fraser, 2013; Frisen et al., 2014; Kofoed & Ringrose, 2012; McInroy & Mishna, 2017; Maher, 2008; Mishna, McLuckie et al., 2009; Mishna, Sinai et al., 2009; Pelfrey & Weber, 2014; Raferty & Ven, 2014; Spears et al., 2009). From these research studies four common sub-themes emerged. The first was that adolescents believe that there are gender differences in how cyberbullying occurs and who the victims are (Ackers, 2012; Frisen et al., 2014; Maher, 2008; Smith et al., 2008). Using a mixed methods approach, Smith and colleagues (2008) did not find any significant gender differences in cyberbullying. However, upon further research using focus groups, they discovered that students believed girls were more likely to be involved in cyberbullying and more likely to be victims. Additionally, boys were more likely than girls to demonstrate a desire for power in online interactions (Maher, 2008, McInroy &

Mishna, 2017; Spears et al., 2009). This is consistent with previous research indicating that boys seek power and dominance (Engerman, 2016). The second sub-theme was that both students and educators believe cyberbullying is not as prominent as society believes it is (Ackers, 2012; Cassidy et al., 2012; Law Shapka, Domene et al 2012; Law Shapka Hymel et al., 2012). Third, children and adolescents found it difficult to differentiate between joking behaviour and cyberbullying (Baas et al., 2013; Mishna, McLuckie et al., 2009; Naruskov et al., 2012; Paul et al., 2012; Pelfrey & Weber, 2014; Spears et al., 2009). Baas and colleagues (2013) identified that children had a difficult time distinguishing a prank from cyberbullying. The final theme was that adolescents believed that although cyberbullying occurs, it is ubiquitous in the lives of youth today (Allen, 2012; Bryce & Fraser, 2013; McInroy & Mishna, 2017). In fact, McInroy and Mishna (2017) identified within the gaming culture cyberbullying occurred according to the definition provided, however participants either said it was part of the gaming culture or they did not identify the behaviours as cyberbullying.

Gaps in the Literature

Although there have been a number of research studies on defining cyberbullying characteristics of cyberbullies and victims, prevalence, impact, and experiences, minimal research has dealt specifically with cyberbullying and gaming (Ballard & Welch, 2017; Fryling et al., 2015; Li & Pustaka, 2017; McInroy & Mishna, 2017). Following some of the guidelines and areas for future research that McInroy and Mishna identified in their 2017 study, as well as others; the proposed research study will attempt to investigate a variety of factors. Firstly, while most research has focused on both male and female cyberbullying behaviour, because boys predominantly are engaged in online gaming this study will sample only males. Additionally, the current research on gaming and cyberbullying has focused primarily on MMOGs (Ballard &

Welch, 2017; McInroy & Mishna, 2017) or a specific game (Fryling et al., 2015). This research study will encompass all forms of online gaming, whether it be MMOGs, console or computer games, allowing for a much broader sampling of participants. Instead of using children and youth as most qualitative studies in cyberbullying research have, the current study will sample young adult males who will be asked to talk about their gaming experiences retrospectively. Aside from McInroy and Mishna's 2017 study, all other studies on cyberbullying and gaming have focused on adults (Ballard & Welch, 2017; Fryling et al., 2015; Li & Pustaka, 2017). To my knowledge no research on cyberbullying and cyberbullying and gaming has been investigated retrospectively. By conducting a retrospective study, young adult males will be asked to reflect on their adolescent gaming experiences. This is intended to avoid and address adolescents' reporting issues and fears. Most studies on cyberbullying and gaming have utilized questionnaires and surveys (Ballard & Welch, 2017; Fryling et al., 2015; Li & Pustaka, 2017; McInroy & Mishna, 2017) with only one study involving a qualitative portion (McInroy & Mishna, 2017) using individual interviews. As such, this research will also employ a novel research method by using a focus group methodology to collect data on cyberbullying and gaming. Due to the nature of online gaming being interactive, focus groups allow participants to bounce ideas off each other and validate their experiences as well as stimulate new ideas (Liamputtong, 2011).

Another area of exploration that McInroy and Mishna (2017) identified is to investigate gaming culture. While they, as well as others chose their sample by looking at cyberbullying activities, this study will focus on gaming culture with the goal of unpacking cyberbullying behaviour within gaming culture. For instance, while many researchers report that intent is a key factor in cyberbullying, does the gaming community examine intent in the same way as they

would in a different electronic environment? Although McInroy and Mishna (2017) touched on the role of masculinity and social dominance theory as it relates to gaming, this research will explore how young adult male gamers describe their gaming behaviours and experiences. For instance, how does gender socialization affect the use of swearing, insults, and trash-talking while online gaming? Additionally, the role that friendships play in gaming culture will also be explored. To date only one study has examined the role of friendships and gaming (Leung, 2010). This research will further attempt to understand the experiences of friendships in gaming culture. Finally, one area of research that McInroy and Mishna (2017) discussed that needed further study is the role of escapism and gaming, more specifically, the reasons that young adults are currently engaged in gaming and the reasons they participated in gaming when they were adolescents.

The concept of cyberbullying is often described as using online technologies to harass, intimidate, and hurt others. Cyberbullying in gaming is often described in a similar manner, but online gamers may not view cyberbullying the same way because they have a different set of norms or customs that are separate from other technologies. By investigating the in-depth experiences of gaming culture and by understanding how young male adults frame their adolescent gaming experiences, this research has the potential to help practitioners, educators, and psychologists as well as the general public have a better understanding of the gaming culture.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Chapter three begins with the research questions this study will investigate. The chapter continues by describing the paradigm and research tradition. This is followed by the section on participant selection and recruitment. This section describes the process and reasons for recruitment as well as the methods by which participants were recruited. The rationale for using a semi-structured interview format and focus groups, the consent process, and an explanation of the demographics questionnaire follows. The next section of the chapter discusses the type of data analysis method. Following data analysis methods used to establish trustworthiness are discussed, including how credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were achieved. The final section of this chapter examined ethical considerations including ethics review and confidentiality.

The purpose of this retrospective research study was to explore young adult males' accounts of their adolescent experiences of online gaming using a basic qualitative research approach and focus group and interview data collection methods. The research questions that guided this inquiry were:

- (1) How do young adult males describe and understand their adolescent experiences of online gaming?
- (2) How do young adult males describe, understand, interpret and explain the role that friendships played in their previous adolescent experiences of online gaming?
- (3) How do young male adults frame "normal" online gaming culture and how do they describe and understand cyberbullying?

Paradigm and Research Tradition

This study used a basic qualitative research approach (Merriam, 2002; Sandelowski, 2000) seeking to understand how young adults while online gaming during their adolescence, derive meaning behind the experiences and attitudes of gaming culture, friendships, and cyberbullying. According to Merriam (2002), there are four fundamental elements that appear in basic qualitative research. The first is that qualitative research attempts to understand how people make sense of their experiences in their world. The second is that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. More specifically, the researcher can pursue further clarification, explore an idea in depth, and provide feedback and ideas to the participants in order to check for accuracy and authenticity. Additionally, the researcher brings their own personal experiences to the research question, which must be acknowledged during the research process. My knowledge and understanding of the gaming subculture proved a valuable tool in interviewing, particularly in relation to probing and prompting participants to expand and clarify their responses and comments. Thirdly, qualitative research is inductive, rather than deductive. This means that the researcher's goal is to form concepts and theories during and after the collection of data, instead of testing a hypothesis in the research process. Finally, qualitative research uses descriptive data, meaning that findings are not identified through numbers but in this case through the words of the participants. Participant descriptions, understandings, and narratives are examined in their interviews and focus groups (Liamputtong, 2011; Merriam, 2002).

Basic qualitative inquiry was consistent with the goal of this study because the purpose was to examine how young adult males described and understood their adolescent experiences of online gaming; how young adult males described, understood, interpreted and explained the role

that friendships played in their previous adolescent experiences of online gaming; and how young male adults frame “normal” online gaming culture and how they described and understood the concept of cyberbullying through online gaming. By investigating the in-depth experiences of gaming culture and the cyberbullying experiences among young adult males retrospectively discussing their experiences as teenagers, this study was able to contribute to the literature in describing how young adolescent males feel about gaming culture and cyberbullying while playing online video games.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

The target population in this study consisted of young adult males between the ages of 18 – 25 who self-identified as online gamers, who played online games more than one hour per week during their adolescence years, on multiple gaming platforms, in a Western Canadian city. The decision to use young adults and ask them to reflect back, in a retrospective way, on their online gaming experiences as adolescents was made because some researchers have found that adolescents have a difficult time fully understanding the definition of cyberbullying and being able to adequately express their feelings regarding cyberbullying (Baas et al., 2013; Compton et al., 2014; Grigg, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Holfeld & Leadbeater, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2014; Kota et al., 2014; Law, Shapka, Domene et al., 2012; Naruskov et al., 2012; Navarro & Serna, 2016; Nocentini et al., 2010; Pelfrey & Weber, 2014; Pieschl et al., 2015; Pieschl et al., 2013; Spears et al., 2009; Vandebosch & Cleemput, 2008). The assumption made in this study was that young adults will be better able than adolescents to articulate their thoughts and experiences of cyberbullying through online gaming.

After receiving ethical approval from the University of Saskatchewan’s Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BEH#533), this study used purposeful homogenous sampling.

Purposeful homogenous sampling allowed participants to be selected because of the amount of detail they could provide about a specific phenomenon (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007; Hays & Singh, 2012). In this instance, the experiences of online gaming culture and cyberbullying in online gaming for adolescent boys, as recalled as young adults, were investigated. Although sometimes it is advantageous to have a heterogeneous sample in focus groups, with such a sensitive topic, a homogeneous sample was preferred (Liamputtong, 2011).

Recruitment methods. Several methods were utilized to recruit participants for the study. The first method involved drawing from the University's information system through online recruitment bulletins (See Appendix B). A second recruitment method involved placing physical posters in high traffic areas at the university as well as at a local board game store (See Appendix C). Thirdly, the study poster was electronically posted on the university's board and video game Facebook group. A fourth recruitment method was through the use of snowball sampling, which is a purposeful sampling method, also known as *chain or network sampling* whereby the researcher seeks participants based on referrals from previous participants (Hays & Singh, 2012). Finally as an incentive, an opportunity to build rapport, and as a token of appreciation, pizza and soft drinks were provided during the focus groups and interviews.

Following recruitment, the participants were divided into focus groups and interviews based on their availability. Precautions were taken to separate participants who knew each other into different focus groups. The reason for this cautionary step was that while focus groups help individuals discuss shared experiences, some participants may feel uncomfortable or hindered talking about this topic in front of friends or acquaintances.

Focus groups. This retrospective study utilized focus groups. There are several reasons why focus groups have been identified as the optimum method of data collection to meet the

goals of this study. The first reason dealt with homogeneity. According to Liamputtong (2011), if individuals have shared experiences they may feel more comfortable and open up about their experiences with one another, as opposed to sharing their experiences with the researcher alone. The second reason focus groups were utilized was due to time constraints and pragmatic concerns. If individual interviews were to be conducted, it could take a very long time to collect sufficient data. Being that cyberbullying can be a difficult and personal topic to discuss, using focus groups in this study potentially made it easier for participants to describe their experiences. Focus groups are a great way for individuals who have a shared experience to come together as a group and talk about these experiences as well as their feelings and attitudes towards the subject (Liamputtong, 2011). Often times it can be easier to discuss difficult issues with the support of others, as opposed to talking in a one-on-one interview. If an interview method was employed, the fear was that the participants, who are all male, would not talk about their experiences as in-depth as they might if they were in a focus group.

The attempt was made to create each focus group with between five to eight young adult males (18-25) who self-identified as online gamers. The rationale for using five to eight individuals was that most researchers agree that under four participants may prove insufficient for theme saturation (Heary & Hennessy, 2002; Liamputtong, 2011). Conversely, more than 10 participants may create problems in that certain individuals could take over the conversation, which would prevent other individuals from contributing (Liamputtong, 2011). Most research conducted on the validity of focus groups has established that each construct being examined requires a minimum of three focus groups (Liamputtong, 2011). As data analysis occurred, purposeful recruitment of new participants was conducted in order to saturate categories that emerged.

At the beginning of each focus group, participants completed two identical consent forms that the researcher reviewed with them. One of the signed consent forms was kept for the researcher's records and the other was provided for the participant's records. The consent form contained information regarding the objectives of the study, procedure, potential risks, potential benefits, confidentiality (and limits to), data storage, right to withdraw, follow-up, and an opportunity to ask any questions or voice any concerns participants may have had (see Appendix D and E). During the consent process, participants were informed of confidentiality concerns and asked not to share the content of what was said outside the focus group.

Once participants signed the consent forms, they were asked to complete a basic demographics questionnaire that included questions about each participant's age, location, level of education, and area of study/occupation. Other variables that were included were: how often participants play games online in a week (both as teenagers and currently); how many hours a day participants play online (both as teenagers and currently); who they primarily played with (i.e., friends, strangers, or both); what gaming platforms they use for online gaming; and what genre of games they played (see Appendix F).

Semi-structured interviews. This study employed a semi-structured interview guide in the focus groups. A semi-structured interview guide allowed for a vibrant exchange of ideas, views, beliefs and experiences between participants and the researcher while the researcher maintained a focus on the topic (Liamputtong, 2011). The questions asked in the interview guide were specific in nature regarding the types of games participants played, and various questions regarding gaming culture, their friendships, trash-talking and cyberbullying while playing online, and their personal experiences (see Appendix G for Focus Group and Semi-structured Interview Guide). The reason for choosing a semi-structured interview as opposed to other methods (such

as structured or unstructured) was the desire to explore specific aspects of gaming culture. Using this format allowed me to refine questions that emerged from previous responses and previous groups. Using a structured interview format would not allow these modifications and thereby may not have been as useful a tool when trying to provide a deeper understanding of participants' adolescent experiences.

Ultimately, with the exception of one focus group, recruiting five to eight participants for each focus group was not possible, primarily because of participant scheduling difficulties. These difficulties included conflicts with classes, other competing commitments, and being unavailable when other prospective participants and the interviewer were available. In response to these difficult and unexpected situations (such as when multiple potential participants failed to show up for the scheduled focus group session), rather than lose the potential participants who did show up, I conducted focus groups with any number of participants less than five and greater than one. I also conducted individual interviews with participants whose schedules could not accommodate the focus group times. During the focus groups and interviews participants were provided a scenario about two friends interacting with each other in an online game (see appendix G, question 5). During the scenario one of the characters made disparaging comments to the other character and participants in the current study had to answer questions on whether or not they considered this cyberbullying. The participants were also given different friendship variations in order to expand and clarify. They were given the same scenario but the characters' role and relationships to each other changed. For example, at first the participants did not know that the characters were friends online. Another variation was that participants knew the characters were friends before online gaming. A third variation was they were told the characters were friends but the game was different.

The focus groups and interviews each took 60-90 minutes to complete and all focus groups and interviews were digitally audio recorded. Upon completion of the focus groups and individual interviews, participants were provided pizza and soft drinks. Finally, all participants were debriefed verbally and offered a copy of the study's debrief form that further described the nature of the study. Participants were also offered additional resources for counselling if they expressed experiencing any distress from the focus groups or interviews (see Appendix H). Although counselling resources were planned for and provided, none of the participants requested to use these resources.

Data Analysis

All sessions were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim, aside from the participants' identifiable information, by utilizing the University of Saskatchewan's Social Sciences Research Laboratories service (SSRL). Recording data verbatim reduced any potential personal biases that could develop solely from the researcher's written notes on the emerging data. Since the goal of this study was to find patterns in the experiences of gaming culture, friendships, and cyberbullying through online gaming, thematic analysis was used. This method uncovered similarities, differences, and themes in the participants' experiences and from these themes emerging patterns were identified. This was achieved through a six-step process.

In the first step I read and familiarized myself with the transcripts. Once I familiarized myself with the data, I began to code the transcripts in the margins into potential constructs based on what the participants were saying. In step two I generated initial codes of interesting features. In this step I reviewed the constructs to ensure that my initial thoughts on constructs were accurate. In step three I collated codes to form potential themes. In this stage I examined the construct codes looking for similarities. I began to group constructs into similar categories in

order to develop possible themes. In step four I reviewed themes and created a thematic map. Once the initial themes were developed, I further evaluated and assessed whether or not the constructs fit within the themes. In the fifth step I defined and named all relevant themes and patterns. I grouped the themes together and identified patterns. Finally, in step six I produced the report using selected themes related to the research questions and literature (Braun & Clark, 2006). According to Braun and Clark (2006), theme exhaustion occurs when discussion about themes and patterns are repeated to a point where no new information emerges. I completed data analysis when this saturation happened and nothing new was emerging from the focus group and interview participants. As a final note, throughout this process, I worked with a professor emeritus with experience in qualitative research from the University of British Columbia. We reviewed the constructs and themes to ensure accuracy of the results, meeting the trustworthiness criteria of referential.

Trustworthiness

Two of the pioneers for obtaining trustworthiness in qualitative research are Lincoln and Guba (1985), who developed four key components that are now considered the *gold standard* when applying rigour to qualitative research. These four components are: (1) credibility; (2) transferability; (3) dependability; and (4) confirmability. Each element of ensuring trustworthiness also has various techniques that were utilized within this study.

Credibility refers to how believable the conclusions made from the study are. The goal in ensuring a study is credible is to ensure that the study methodology and findings are believable, sound, and have integrity. Another way of understanding credibility is by asking the question, “does this study investigate what it was meant to study?” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Throughout this study, credibility was obtained through a number of trustworthiness techniques including

triangulation, simultaneous data collection and analysis, thick description, use of an audit trail, and referential adequacy. With regards to triangulation, credibility was obtained through triangulation of data methods by utilizing interviews, focus groups, and the data from the questionnaires (Hays & Singh, 2015; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although the study was initially designed using focus groups, attrition and recruitment difficulties led to having three individual interviews in addition to five focus groups. The data from the two methods were triangulated to ascertain the credibility of the findings. In addition, all participants completed a demographic questionnaire before the interviews and focus groups and this data was compared to the interview and focus group findings to ensure consistency.

Another technique used for achieving credibility was simultaneous data collection and analysis (Hays & Singh, 2015; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As data was collected, the data was being simultaneously analyzed in order to ensure that saturation of themes occurred. In this process, I restructured and redesigned the focus group guide to best capture data on emerging constructs and themes. A third technique used was thick description. Thick description refers to providing a detailed account of the research process and outcome (Hays & Singh, 2015; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This was achieved by describing in detail my theoretical framework, formulation of research questions, description of participant recruitment, and data analysis steps, as well as providing verbatim quotations from participants in the Findings chapter. Another technique for obtaining credibility was through an audit trail. An audit trail provides physical evidence of how the study was conducted and data was collected and analyzed (Hays & Singh, 2015; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). More specifically, in this study this was achieved through the use of a detailed timeline of research activities (see Table 2), consent forms (see Appendix D & E), demographics questionnaire (see Appendix F), and interview and focus group guide (see Appendix G). Finally,

referential adequacy was utilized by asking the previously mentioned colleague if the constructs and themes that I discovered were consistent with what they saw when reading and reviewing the transcripts.

The second element, transferability, can be understood as how the information gathered from the qualitative study can be transferable to other situations and populations. The best way to ensure transferability is by providing rich descriptive data so that other investigators could know in detail the current research process and sample in order to replicate the study and apply the findings to their different contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability was achieved through triangulation of research methods (focus groups and individual interviews), providing thick description, and an audit trail.

Dependability or authenticity, the third factor in establishing trustworthiness, refers to how consistent the results of the study are across participants, over time and across multiple researchers. In this instance, like reliability in quantitative research, researchers must engage in strategies to show that similar findings extend to similar studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability was achieved through triangulation of data methods, simultaneous data collection and analysis, thick description, member checking and prolonged engagement. Member checking involves ongoing consultation with participants, where they are actively involved in the research process as they reflect on emerging themes and patterns. The purpose is to accurately portray the participants' responses. In the current study this was achieved by paraphrasing participant responses and clarifying what they meant as they participated in the focus groups and interviews to ensure I accurately understood what they were saying and experiencing. Lastly, prolonged engagement refers to remaining in the field to build relationships with participants. Although the

time spent with participants was relatively short, I have spent years within the online gaming community as a young adult which enhanced rapport with participants.

The fourth and final aspect of obtaining trustworthiness in qualitative research is through confirmability. Confirmability means finding ways to minimize the researcher's interference in the study, and more importantly, placing the emphasis on the data itself. More specifically, the question to be asked is "are the findings grounded in the data" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p323). Confirmability was achieved through member checking, prolonged engagement, triangulation, simultaneous data collection and analysis, and thick description.

Ethical Considerations

An ethics application was submitted to and approved by the University's Research Ethics Board on January 22, 2019 (BEH 533). The ethics application outlined standard ethical considerations such as funding, participant recruitment, informed consent, methods and procedures, storage of data, distribution of results, risks and benefits, safety, confidentiality, debriefing and feedback, as well as any conflicts of interest.

During recruitment, in order to maintain confidentiality, participants were instructed to contact me via email or private message. Furthermore, any correspondence between myself and participants was conducted through individual emails. When participants completed the demographics questionnaire, they were asked not to put their names on the paper, nor were they asked any questions that could identify them in the future. Another way confidentiality was maintained was that participants were given pseudonyms and no identifiable personal information was included in the study's report. Furthermore, any identifiable information (such as the consent forms) are stored separately from any other collected data. Finally, during the review of the consent forms I asked participants to respect the other participants and not to

disclose any information that was discussed in the focus groups. I also told the participants the limits to confidentiality and situations where I would have to break confidentiality as it related to harming themselves, harming others, or engaging in criminal activity.

This chapter discussed the methodology used in this study. It began by addressing the research questions, followed by describing the paradigm and research tradition, as well as participant selection and recruitment methods. The chapter then discussed the use of Braun and Clark's (2006) thematic analysis for analyzing the results. The chapter concluded by discussing how trustworthiness was achieved as well as the ethical considerations that needed to be addressed. The next chapter, the results, reviews the themes that emerged from the data in the transcripts. The final chapter, the discussion discusses the meanings and interpretations of these themes, how they relate to each other and theory, and how the results from the current study relate to previous research.

Chapter 4: Results

The results chapter begins with a description of the participants, including the number of participants, where participants were gathered from, their education level, the age of participants and their pseudonyms. The next section discusses the participants' game play activities such as days per week spent playing, hours per day participants played online games, who they played games with, what consoles they used, and what genres they played. The chapter concludes with the themes that emerged from the data collected from the participants.

Participants

The current study recruited participants between February and March of 2019 from a variety of sources including the University of Saskatchewan, Facebook groups, and the General Education Development (GED) program at the Learning Disabilities Association of Saskatchewan (LDAS). A total of eight interviews/focus groups were conducted. Table 2 displays the focus group number, interview method, recruitment method, the number of participants that were recruited for each focus group or interview, the number of participants who attended each focus group or interview, as well as the participants' pseudonyms.

A total of 27 potential participants showed initial interest in participating in the study; however ultimately 19 participants volunteered to participate in a 60-90 minute interview/focus group session. The average age of participants was 22.15 years with the age ranging from 18 to 26 years. Although the recruitment age was 18 to 25, one of the participants turned 26 one day before the focus group was conducted and was therefore included in the study. The majority of participants ($n=15$; 79%) were from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, however a few participants ($n=3$; 16%) were from surrounding Saskatchewan towns including Martinsville, Meadow Lake and Nipawin, and one participant was from Calgary, Alberta.

Table 4.1
Focus Group Information

Interview/ Focus Group Number	Method	Recruitment Method	Recruitment Number	Participation Number	Pseudonym
1	Interview	University Bulletin	3	1	P1: Jonathan
2	Focus Group	University Bulletin	3	2	P1: Adam P2: Greg
3	Interview	University Facebook Gaming Group	1	1	P1:Aaron
4	Interview	University Bulletin	2	1	P1: Alex
5	Focus Group	University Bulletin	2	2	P1: Jeremy P2: Wesley
6	Focus Group	University Bulletin	5	2	P1:Linderman P2: Seth
7	Focus Group	University Bulletin	5	4	P1: Bryan P2: Tony P3: Henry P4: Wade
8	Focus Group	Poster at Learning Disabilities Association	6	6	P1: Sean P2: Sam P3: Charles P4: Mike P5: Doug P6: Hunter

In terms of educational background, the majority of participants were students ($n=18$; 95%); while one participant possessed a Bachelor's degree who was no longer a university student and was currently working full time. The students represented a variety of academic

programs including medicine, chemical engineering, agriculture, education, sociology, computer science, fine arts, environmental studies, and some students were obtaining their GED.

Gaming Demographics

Table 3 outlines the number of days and hours participants played online in both their teenage years and their current game play. Results suggested that on average, participants continue to be active in online gaming today but not as frequently or intensively as reported in their teen years.

Table 4.2
Frequency of Gaming

Number of Days/ Number of Hours Played per Week	Teenage Years (<i>n</i>=19)	Current (<i>n</i>=19)
4 ≥ days/week	14	10
3 days/week	4	4
2 days/week	0	2
1 day/week	1	3
4 ≥ hours/day	9	7
2-4 hours/day	6	4
1-2 hours/day	3	5
≤ 1 hour/day	1	3

When investigating who participants played with online, the vast majority (85%) played with a combination of friends and strangers (*n*=16); while two participants played exclusively with friends, and one individual played online videogames primarily with strangers. In terms of gaming platforms used, participants were asked to consider all gaming platforms in which they played online games in their teens. Results indicated that over half of all participants (*n*=13; 69%) played on a PC or laptop, nine participants played on either a Sony PlayStation 3 or 4, and seven played on either Microsoft Xbox 360 or Xbox One. In terms of other gaming platforms, two participants used their smartphones, and one participant used handheld gaming devices (such

as Nintendo DS or Nintendo 3DS). Finally, one participant also reported using a Nintendo gaming console such as Wii, WiiU or Nintendo Switch.

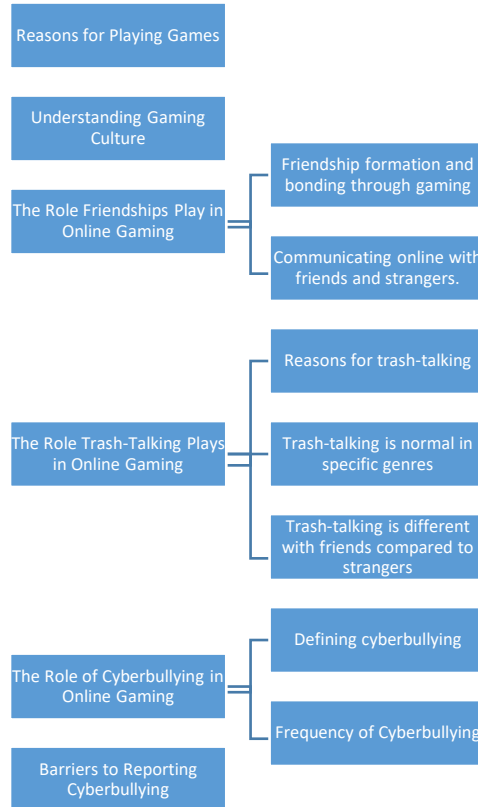
Participants engaged in a wide variety of game genres. While the specific games participants played changed over time from teenagers to young adults, the genre did not. The majority of participants ($n=15$; 79%) enjoyed playing First Person Shooter (FPS) games (such as the Call of Duty or the Battlefield series); fourteen participants (74%) played action games (i.e., The Witcher, Red Dead Redemption). Furthermore, thirteen participants (68%) played adventure games (i.e., God of War, Assassins Creed), Massive Multiplayer Online Games (MMOG's or MMO's) (i.e., World of Warcraft), and Role Playing Games (RPG's) (i.e., Final Fantasy). Other genres included combat games ($n=10$, 53%) (i.e., Gears of War), strategy games (i.e. Rainbow Six) ($n=9$; 47%), fighting games ($n=6$; 32%) (i.e., Mortal Kombat or Street Fighter) and Real Time Strategy (RTS) games ($n=6$; 32%) (i.e., StarCraft or Warcraft). Puzzle games (i.e., Candy Crush or Tetris), racing games (i.e., Gran Turismo), sports games (i.e., NHL or Madden), and stealth games (i.e., Metal Gear Solid), were played by four participants, and one participant played educational games (i.e., Big Brain Academy or Brain Age). Lastly, five participants reported playing other games including Massive Online Battle Arenas (MOBA's) (i.e., League of Legends), Battle Royale games (i.e., Fortnite or Apex), and building games (i.e., Roller Coaster Tycoon or Civilization).

Themes

From the three individual interviews and eight focus groups conducted with a total of 19 participants, six major themes developed: (1) Reasons for playing online games, both during their adolescence and currently; (2) Understanding gaming culture; (3) The role friendships play in online gaming; (4) The role trash-talking plays in online gaming; (5) The role of cyberbullying

in online gaming; and (6) Barriers to reporting cyberbullying. Figure 1 represents the hierarchy of emergent themes and sub-themes.

Figure 4.1 Hierarchy of Emergent Themes



Theme 1: Reasons for Playing Online Games

In reflecting on their experiences playing online games as teenagers, participants reported that they tended to start off playing video games with each other in the same room. Their gaming then moved to playing with each other online but from different houses. As Jonathan stated, “We would literally just watch each other play. We wouldn’t even play together because some of these are one player games.” Seth added, “It was a common thing. We all played games together... same room, like split screen. Most of my child(hood) friends.” Jonathan concurred about how video games brought people together when he said:

I think definitely bringing people together was a good reason to play games back in the day. We would bring Guitar Hero into our classrooms in grade nine. I remember we would have a Guitar Hero party for the whole day...

Jonathan continued:

...we kind of went from this transition to 'come over to my house let's play together' to 'stay at your house, I'll stay at my house, we'll play games online, and then we'll bring in some other people we don't know' and now we're back to 'hey let's meet up and play this game together in real life.

One of the reasons why participants started playing games in their teenage years was for leisure. As several participants pointed out:

Going way back when ...I played offline, it was just because I enjoyed the game, that's about the fun. But... when I went online, I found it to be more fun. That was kind of a big draw, to be able to play with other people and get together with friends. (Adam)

Greg agreed by stating, "...it is another way to meet and have social time with your friends just like going out to skateboard with your friends, you can go out to play games with your friends."

Another participant, Seth, agreed that he currently continued to play games for leisure when he said, "... I play to still have fun. If I have a good time, it doesn't matter if I win or lose if I'm with a group of friends."

Another reason participants played games was to stave off boredom. As Jeremy stated, "It was a time killer for sure, if I ever got bored I would just play video games." For Sean, he played games as both a form of leisure and a way to reduce boredom:

Gave me something to do after school, gave me something to pass the time. I wasn't like most guys where I had money to go on vacations or go to all these swimming pools, rock

climb, do all that incredible family-friendly, family-oriented s***. Instead I had me, myself, and my game. That's what I did everyday.

Many of the participants played games to reduce stress both in the past and currently. Greg spoke about his gaming behaviour as. "...something to separate myself from my work, to do something that's at least enjoyable, get my mind relaxed and refreshed, then I will do something that puts me in a totally different situation." Jeremy added when talking about his adolescence, "When I need a break I either go to The Witcher or Monster Hunter, or Final Fantasy and I get to just zone out for an hour or two, be happy, and then go back to whatever." Sam played games both currently and in the past to reduce stress. He added, "Personally, if you're having a s***** day it's pretty fun going and killing a bunch of people... I play games just to get other things off my mind and focus on one thing. Playing for hours and hours..." Both in the past and in the present Jeremy gamed to relieve stress when he was having a bad day. He stated:

...I use gaming as a stress reliever. And sometimes if I'm having a real bad day I'll play... I generally keep my mic off if I'm having a bad day and I just want to kind of escape... I think a lot of people who use video games as just an emotional dumping space...

Bryan agreed and added, "...it's a nice vent for me for all my energy, and then when I go to school I can be a lot more chill." Participants, both in the past and present play games as a form of escape: From Jonathan, "...I can say it's an escape... Whether it's playing for a good story or playing for the challenge". Another participant, Jeremy agreed that both in the past and presently, gaming allowed him "... to see a separate world... it was a chance for me to just kind of take my mind off whatever was happening around."

Furthermore, some participants played games not just as a form of escape but also to become immersed in the game. Jeremy spoke about his love for video games both in the past and

currently, "... I played video games because I loved them. The visuals, the music, have a gigantic impression on me... It's an immersion thing for me as well. I just enjoy games as an art." Alex spoke about immersion in the game as an adolescent, "If you were playing Spider-Man games, you got to be Spider-Man. You got to do all those things you see them do in the movies...". Tony provided additional evidence of immersion as a reason to play games when he said, "...I like the story and the role playing. Plus the chance to get away from the real world and just be who you are in the game. I just find that magical." Alex had an interesting perspective about using gaming as a form of escape as well as becoming immersed in the game when he said,

"...maybe you are just wanting to live out some kind of other kind of life be it a soldier in FPS games, a superhero in a hero game, their favourite athlete in a sports game, some mystical creature in some other game, and maybe people are just wanting to hit pause on their own life so to speak, to see maybe life through another life's eyes."

While other participants played games for the competitive aspect of it with themselves or others both in the past and currently:

"The thing that I enjoy about playing games is the exercise in a different style of thinking. Different types of games, you have different challenges that you need different ways of looking at them to solve. What I like is being challenged..." (Greg)

Bryan also played games for the competitiveness of it when he said,

"...reasoning was still the same, just the competitiveness thing... I like winning, and that's pretty much it. And it's something to work towards. I've found that I'm a competitive person, and if I don't fuel it into games then I think it has unhealthy consequences for me in my personal life."

The final reason why some participants played games was to maintain friendships if they were in other cities or countries. As Aaron pointed out, "...I'm in touch with my friends back in my country. We still talk through these games even if we don't communicate through social media...". Henry agreed with Aaron when he said, "I'm from Calgary, all my friends still game with me online, so we keep in touch." Adam agreed when he talked about maintaining friendships back home when he said,

A lot of my friends back home play video games, so I find it's a good way to stay connected with them. It's a good way to allow us to do something together even when we're not in the same place. And it's allowed me to keep a lot of friendships actually, like, when I haven't seen them for up to years in person, I still feel like I'm connecting with them on a daily basis.

Altogether, participants reported seven main reasons for playing online games: (1) for leisure; (2) to reduce and/or prevent boredom; (3) to relieve stress; (4) as a form of escape; (5) as immersion; (6) for competition; and (7) to maintain friendships. In general participants' reasons for playing games did not change over time from their teenage years to young adulthood. The reasons stayed the same but the context differed such as gaming to reduce school stress versus work stress.

Theme 2: Understanding Gaming Culture

In order to obtain a better understanding of gaming culture, participants were asked to define *gaming culture*. The majority of participants agreed that gaming culture was too broad to define as a single concept. Greg described American culture as analogous to gaming culture:

I think you can compare someone saying gaming culture... to saying something like American culture. If you look into the details, there are some things that is culturally normal in the south that is not culturally normal in the north of the United States.

Alex, another participant from a different focus group agreed:

...gaming culture is honestly like a society in its own. In society nowadays you can classify people... into so many different groups based off of income, family, gender, race, religion... I think gaming culture, you can kind of do the same thing. People who play casually, just to have fun, people who devote their lives to it... and then you can classify it by what games they're playing, what backgrounds they have in certain games, their skill, and what they've seen in the gaming community...

Seth had similar views when he stated:

You've got your different types of games. You got your competitive Call of Duty and Halo, first person shooter titles, but you also got your League of Legends championships, you got your StarCraft championships for strategy. So each has their own different culture surrounding that area.

Henry, from yet a different focus group, tended to agree that 'gaming culture' was too broad when he stated,

There's competitive games, and then there's RPG, fantasy, PvP...even just breaking it down to console gamers, PC gamers, phone gamers, like those are very big. Even just Xbox, PS4 versus PC gamers. I'd say there's a pretty big difference in culture.

Bryan, who attended the same focus group as Henry, agreed:

I think it's hard to look at gaming culture as a whole thing, because I think video games in general are just part of the broader culture now. I think you have to look at individual

aspects of it, like competitive games, or you can look at games that have some sort of scholarly value, games as entertainment, there's a lot of parts to it.

Adam supported this notion when he said:

Gaming culture as a whole, I just don't know because... it depends on the game. When you think of Call of Duty that might be the norm. But if you play a different game that wouldn't be the norm... When you talk about gaming culture as a whole, it's too broad of a statement, you can't really – when you read stuff about gaming culture and the negative aspects of it, you can't lump everyone into one category. It's too broad of a statement. The only similarity in gaming culture is you play games, video games.

Regardless of the focus group or interview, participants tended to independently respond that gaming culture was too complex to define as a single unit. According to participants in this study, multiple subsets of gaming culture exist, primarily defined by the genre. Participants tended to like a particular genre and learned the culture of that genre in interaction with friends and strangers. The following theme relates to the importance of forming and maintaining friends in online gaming.

Theme 3: The Role Friendships Play in Online Gaming

Within the theme 'the role friendships play in online gaming' two sub-themes emerged: (a) Friendship formation and bonding through gaming, and (b) Communicating online with friends and strangers.

Sub-theme A: Friendship formation. Participants talked about their early gaming experiences as a way to build friendships. For example, Jonathan said:

... maybe you're not too great friends with these people, you just met them, and 'hey come on over we'll play video games' and you had to kind of play a co-op game, it was a good

way to kind of build the friendship and learn how to play with each other... it was a good way to learn how to win and to lose as a child.

Greg used an analogy of skateboarding as an activity to do with friends, "It is comparable to after school, your friends would get together and go skateboarding, some activity to do together... we played games together to develop the friendship." Another participant, Adam, agreed that gaming was a way to build friendships, "... gaming definitely helped that friendship with that person in high school because I wouldn't really have a friendship with him otherwise." When explaining how friends are formed online, Jeremy said:

...I started meeting people outside my circle of friends... I'm still friends with people seven or eight years ago that I met online... whereas all my childhood friends, they kind of moved on, done their own things. Many of them I don't even see online anymore... but this core group of people that I consistently play with, I haven't even met person to person, but I can speak confidently about them, they are my friends, I just haven't met them.

Bryan also was in agreement when discussing friendship formation:

...I'm still friends with people who I used to play Smash with. And we don't play Smash anymore, but I still maintain that friendship. But then there's all these newer people coming into the scene... I find it to be a lot less personable, and it's harder to make friends with them.

Alex addressed how playing the same game enhanced friendships when he stated, "... it definitely brought new friendships. Friendships that I did have, once we realized 'hey we play the same game on the same system, why don't we play together' so it made some friendships even stronger."

Despite online games being the impetus for forming friendships, participants commonly stated that once they stopped playing the game, they would often lose contact with those friends.

As Wade stated:

... at some points you'll get sick of the game, they will quit the game, so we are not really even playing anymore together. At first, I didn't see it as a way for me to maintain friendships and it kind of feels like losing friends more than it actually keeps friends together, at least in my case.

Within the same focus group Bryan agreed when he stated, "... you stop playing the game, sometimes you're not friends with those people anymore... I've definitely experienced that, like with my high school internet friends. I stopped playing DOTA and then I'm not friends with them anymore." Additionally, Bryan suggested that maintaining friendships was analogous to working with a co-worker when he said:

... You have to treat it like a friendship as opposed to some co-worker relationship... you're playing a game together, like you're in a job together, but that's your only thread. So, it's like as soon as the person doesn't work there, or game, then it's gone.

Many participants agreed that in order to maintain friendships they had to engage in other topics outside of the game. As Bryan stated, "All the friendships that I formed we found some other things. So, a lot of times there's a big crossover with people who are in the music scene, so that kind of helps maintain the friendships." Aaron agreed about the importance of talking about other things outside the game in order to maintain their online friends when he said, "I don't see him as a gamer... we're not really talking about games anymore, we either talk about university tales, but in a bigger picture we still keep in touch talking about current life." Jeremy agreed, "... there's only so much about that game that you can really talk about until you start kind of sharing

stories...you are really getting to know the people... from there it's only inevitable that you start understanding the person." Jeremy continued,

I honestly think my gamer friends know more about me than some of my friends that I have here know about me, which is kind of scary but also very kind of comforting... I know these people have a like mind, they have the same interests as me.

Others were in agreement when they talked about the importance of maintaining friendships outside of the game. As Wade said:

... there was this one guy friend, even though we stopped playing the game we still have the interests that we formed some kind of discussion about it... we would talk about anime or other hobbies to keep this connection going. Even to this day we will still talk every once in a while.

Tony concurred when he said, "I guess in my case it's just we talk about life and jobs, and just everything, like a real connection with people." Henry, a participant from the same focus group agreed when he said, "It's just like life, right, you have to actually want to get to know people... One guy, I know what he does for a living." Henry continued, "... the only way you're ever gonna remain friends with them is if you start talking about other s*** - other than video games. If you just keep it to the game, you're gonna probably lose contact."

Online gaming did not just help form friendships. Nearly all of the participants reported that online gaming helped in bonding with both online friends and those friends they had prior to online gaming. When talking about bonding and shared interests prior to online gaming, Jonathan said:

...me and some of my best friends would just sit and play games for hours and hours and hours on end...I think it's probably still a way that people bond, over games. So, it's a

shared interest. You have to work together. Just comfort around people and stuff like that. I think yeah, it's definitely a good bonding experience. Whether it's learning to play together and be co-operative or taking turns.

Jeremy provided further evidence of bonding with online friends:

... I realized that these people are more than just people that I gamed with. It's like, we genuinely know each other, we genuinely care about each other. And the time that we spend with these people is actually important. Not only for me, but for them as well... It's kind of surreal, kind of out worldly to think that you can foster such relationships without actually being physically engaged in that world of theirs, like you're not in the same space but you still have that kind of connection.

In contrast, one participant did not want to bond with his friends online, he just wanted to play the game. As Wesley claimed:

“So been playing with some of my friends from elementary school... I'm more better off playing alone... 'cause I can relax... I feel like I'm better off playing alone, I don't really want to bond all the time with my friends playing the same old match all over again... I don't really have time to talk, I just want to do what I really want to do like adventure...”

Participants agreed that both gaming in the same room and then in online environments helped form friendships with new friends as well as helped create stronger bonds with friends they had prior to gaming. They also stressed the importance of talking about other shared interests or life issues, other than the game so they would not lose that friendship. Not only did gaming help maintain and build friendship, participants also reported that gaming enhanced all communication between friends and strangers.

Sub-theme B: Communicating online with friends and strangers. In addition to bonding with friends, many of the participants suggested that gaming helped facilitate conversations with other people. As Jonathan explained, "...if you put two kids next to each other, are they gonna have like a conversation? Not really. They need something to do together. So, the game would facilitate that for sure. And they wouldn't get bored." Charles also provided evidence of how gaming facilitates conversation when he said:

Me and my brother got a stronger relationship from it 'cause he lived all the way in B.C. and I was living in Alberta. We just played Black Ops to game, chill, talk all night...ask how he's doing, see how things are up in B.C. [he] asks me how our parents are doing, find out what's going on in life.

Greg agreed that gaming facilitates conversation when he said:

We wouldn't really talk to each other during the school time but we went online and we were together talking, and playing, and everything. I would say we were good friends. That dynamic completely changed from when we were online in the game and present at school.

Alex discussed how gaming helped facilitate conversations as well as helped him develop communication skills when he stated:

...I learned how to talk to different people in a gaming sense because, at least from my experience, how people talk to each other when they're playing games can be very different as to how they'd interact socially if people had just walked into each other... It taught me how to communicate game wise which in the long run, I think helped develop speaking just to other people.

Aaron and a number of other participants viewed gaming as a way to communicate with others as they reported struggles with face-to-face communications:

In my case... I like to control people...and I tried to keep people in order and tried to speak all the time. But in high school I only used to speak when it was necessary or when I had something really important to say. But in the games, I was able to command people, tell people what to do.

Jeremy was in agreement that it is easier to talk to people online than in person when he said:

...in a way I have an easier time interacting with people through gaming instead of actually physically interchanging[sic] with them face to face, just because there's an anonymous factor there, it's not as stressful, you're kinda outside of that zone of 'am I doing something wrong', it's just you being genuine... whereas sometimes you can be kind of white lying or altering your personality just because you don't want to come off as standoffish or whatever is going through your head in a person-to-person interaction.

Tony concurred when he talked about how he interacts differently online than in person:

I'm really talkative on the mic, but in public I'm in the corner over there, not really talking to people... I've struggled a lot with just going up to people just talking in general... I feel like it's just easier to talk online than a face-to-face to make a connection and personal.

Sam agreed, stating:

Usually with an online player, you can just talk and be open... it's kinda easier to talk to an online player than it is to someone face-to-face. 'Cause you don't have to necessarily face the person, right? You just have to game out because when you're gaming you're playing your favourite game, you're relaxing, you're having fun, right? When you're like that, it's easier to open up and talk to somebody, especially when it's an online buddy.

Not only did some participants find it easier to talk to online friends than engage in face-to-face conversations, they agreed that the communication between friends and strangers

online differed. As Adam stated, “Regarding the difference between friends we know in person that play online and friends that we don’t know in person that play online...I definitely had much more trust to the people that I knew in person.” Within the same focus group Greg agreed:

I agree with him when he says somebody that you met online and you might’ve spent lots of time with and you maybe have known them for years. I still classify them as a different type of friend than someone I know in real life and personally...It’s a different class ‘cause we haven’t seen them in person so we don’t truly know who they are, we just know how they present themselves.

Adam later stated:

Let’s say I’m playing with two other friends in a campaign in something and a random joins the game, I would just talk to them... I wouldn’t talk with them probably the same way that I talk with my friends just because I don’t know them... I don’t mean that I would be more hostile towards them... I just wouldn’t. Until you get an idea of what kind of person they are, you can start to decide how you want to communicate with them. But at the start, you just be nice...

A number of participants indicated that friendships which were online only were less intimate than friendships they had prior to gaming. While other participants felt that their friendships were stronger with online friends due to struggles with communicating in face-to-face interactions. Many felt that they could be their true selves talking to people online as opposed to in real life. Related to communication all participants agreed that the way they talk to both friends and strangers, particularly trash-talking, was a big component to online gaming.

Theme 4: The Role Trash-Talking Plays in Online Gaming

Within the theme ‘the role trash-talking plays in online gaming’, three sub-themes emerged: (a) Reasons for trash-talking, (b) Trash-talking is normal in specific genres, and (c) Trash-talking is different with friends compared to strangers.

Sub-theme A: Reasons for trash-talking. One of the most frequent themes participants discussed was trash-talking. Participants used a number of words to describe trash-talking including terms such as banter, saying mean things, joking, playing, razzing, teasing, locker room talk, harsh words, negative comments, and s*** talking. Participants also discussed many reasons why they engaged in or were bystanders to trash-talking.

One reason trash-talking was used was as a form of bonding with team mates against the other team. As Jonathan said, “It’s a way of bonding with your team, to trash-talk the other team...you come together by talking down the other team... I think its morale boosting to be honest with you.” Seth agreed about using trash-talking to boost one’s own morale, “...I think it kind of affects your morale, you can trash-talk other people, improve your own morale while also attempting to decrease theirs.” Sean concurred when he said, “They’d trash-talk to boast their own skill and be like, ‘Oh you should just quit so someone else can jump in our team that could actually make a difference.’”

Another way trash-talking was used was as a form of constructive criticism. As Aaron pointed out, “...through this trash-talking people can show their disappointment to a friend, they can show them how bad they feel about a friend’s performance...” Jeremy agreed when he said, “...words can be harsh but their meaning behind isn’t to be degrading, it’s to step up, pull your weight.”

A third reason participants trash-talked was as a way to increase competition. As Alex stated:

Video games, I think, like online games, would be a lot less competitive and a lot more geared towards people who just want to play casually and that's why I think trash-talking has an important spot 'cause there is times I like to be competitive and be the best at said game.

Although Alex used trash-talking to increase competitiveness in the other team, he also said, "And that trash-talking, I may be saying it to someone else, but I'm also saying it to push myself." Bryan agreed that trash-talking is used for competitive purposes, "...it's definitely a big aspect, making someone upset can help you win. And you know... if you want to win - everyone cares about winning, so that's a tool used to win." Jeremy talked about using trash-talking as an "ego boost, power move". Some of the participants also agreed that the more competitive people are, the more aggressive they become, especially in shooting games. As Jonathan said, "...you're definitely more competitive with shooting games; the games that are more violent and gory." Sean agreed, "The more competitive you are, the more you'll trash-talk. I know when I'm in a very competitive mood, I'll actually scream in a mic."

Other participants considered trash-talking to be a form of entertainment. As Alex put it:

I don't think video [gaming] would be the same without it, because sometimes trash-talking can be for some people, some of the more enjoyable times. ...Sometimes I think it would be fun just to see what creative twist of words you can pull out of your head at this moment in time. Trash-talking, honestly can be seen as one big improv scene.

Another participant, Linderman, described trash-talking with strangers as a joke, "...I throw trash-talk at him and he threw it back at me and not really meant to hurt them personally, but not to motivate them either, but just for a joke. We are both trash-talking and just joking."

Jeremy believed trash-talking was used in the heat of the moment, "...they could be yelling at you, they could be frustrated, but that doesn't mean they're being hurtful to you, they're just at that point, kind of exposing their emotional state." A number of participants were in agreement about using trash-talking as a way to "vent out frustration" (Tony) and "let out steam" (Henry). Wade was in agreement when talking about trash-talking occurring in the heat of the moment when he said, "At some point they have too much toxicity inside of them, they need to let it out. And it's contagious. So now it's just passing it back and forth endlessly." Mike agreed with Tony, Henry and Wade when he explained trash-talking as both a way to vent and a heat of the moment situation when he stated, "I would say it's about rage, trash-talk."

Participants reported seven main reasons for engaging in trash-talking: (1) a form of bonding with others on the team; (2) to boost their own morale/ego; (3) as a form of constructive criticism to other team members; (4) a way to increase healthy competition; (5) as a form of entertainment; (6) as a heat of the moment event; and (7) to vent frustration. While participants engaged in trash-talking for a variety of reasons nearly all participants reported that trash-talking was a normal part of gaming, but only in specific genres.

Sub-theme B: Trash-talking is normal in specific genres. Another sub-theme that emerged from many of the participants was that trash-talking appeared to be a normal part of gaming, but only in specific genres. As Adam stated:

...if you're playing this specific game, you shouldn't be surprised if someone's trash-talking you... You'd say that's the culture of the game, you should expect it... I would say from my experience, the more competitive the game, the less friendly people are.

Greg agreed that trash-talking was a normal behaviour for gamers in specific genres when he said, "A different game, yes, you would find more negative comments... they are incentivized to compare against you and try to be better than you, by the nature of the game." Alex concurred when he talked about the role of trash-talking and the specific genre of game when he stated:

...I think it would be a little bit friendlier playing sport games. There still is a decent amount of trash-talking that can go on... but I find, especially first person shooters and MOBA's... people can be a lot more aggressive and a lot more vulgar. The intensity sort of just ramps up...I wouldn't say it's necessary or required, but it's definitely been accepted... I don't think that someone who is insulting and vulgar if they were to go and play something like FIFA or Madden and they were to do that, I think the person that they were playing against would see it as 'whoa this guy's really angry'. It makes them think that something is going on with them, like they got something wrong in their head.

Alex continues, "I think trash-talking language, words, and the terms that are used, they definitely vary from genre to genre and even just game to game. It can be games in the same series."

When asked about gaming scenarios, Jeremy agreed that trash-talking was acceptable in different genres when he said:

Minecraft is – there's a different mentality with that game. I think when you're playing Call of Duty: Black Ops, whatever, visceral shooters, your mindset's in a different state of mind. For me at least. Minecraft, that's the most relaxing thing... but Minecraft isn't a

game that I think intentionally build ideas of negative thinking. Because it's a creative outlet, not a destructive one. So Call of Duty, you're objective is generally to kill, blow up, that obviously fosters a certain frame of mind. Whereas Minecraft you're supposed to build, develop, improve.

Jeremy continued:

When you're playing something as viscerally injected with action as exposures and kills as many of the first-person shooters are, it's inevitable that some emotions of aggression would be riled up, and you can expect excitement or frustration to happen. I mean those are what those games are designed for.

In the same focus group Wesley concurred when he said, "...mostly trash-talking comes from first person shooter games like Call of Duty. I barely see any in Nintendo games like Super Smash Brothers." Other participants supported the notion of trash-talking as being specific to genre culture. As Linderman said:

Depending on the environment we get into, we change. If I'm playing call of Duty we bad mouth more or if we are playing Minecraft we are just goofing off... it's based on the environment...I guess it is based on game to game, trash-talking.

Sean concurred when he talked about trash-talking being normal in specific genres when he said:

Telling someone to quit the game is light compared to what I would have said to lifelong friends and family members that I game with. I'll call them down, tell them to delete their game. I'll even go as far as threatening to go to their house and grabbing their console 'cause they are so s*****. ...But I know them, I know their skills, I've seen them play and if they've done good before, they can do better now. If they do worse than before, I'll start saying s***.

Bryan agreed, “I think if you’re playing a non-competitive game, then that kind of behaviour starts to become ridiculous.” Henry also describe trash-talking as being a normal part of gaming in specific genres when he said:

I don’t think it’s necessarily bullying, but if you play videogames, you definitely had some s****y things written about you, within the game chat. And it probably only happened within the game chat. But if you play online games there’s no getting away from it, it’s gonna happen.

Sam agreed:

...When I’m playing a game, and the game is literally named after a crime [Grand Theft Auto 5], it’s a f****ing game where you go kill people, run up the street, and steal their cars. It’s a game you just have fun on. If someone’s gonna bitch at you because you’re killing him and stealing his car, then f****ing go play a different game. It’s the way the game is played. I’m not gonna go play some other game and pick on somebody when it’s a team-oriented game.

Another conversation amongst participants discussed how trash-talking in gaming doesn’t really affect them:

Hunter: I can’t get cyberbullied because they can’t do nothing to you in your personal life.

Sam: People can try and people can probably attempt it and the furthest they’ve got is pissed me off.

Hunter: Yeah they’ll piss me off but it won’t get me to the next level where I want to punch a hole in the wall or something.

Adam felt differently and thought that negative talk stays with you more:

When you have a negative experience, it sticks more in your head than when you have a positive experience. So I think you could be playing a game and you could have 10 games where everybody was nice and cooperative and it's good, but then you might have one or two games mixed in there where people are trash-talking...being really toxic and I feel like that will stick in your mind more than... those instances that are the good ones... you tend to more remember that and then you think 'oh that's just the culture of the game'.... You remember the negativity. You don't remember what they said, but you remember the negativity.

Sean summed up the general concerns that trash-talking is normal in specific games and genres, "...It's like saying if you're going to be a bartender, do you expect to serve alcohol?"

Participants in the current study believed that trash-talking was normal in specific genres. Some participants even mentioned that despite playing with the same group of people, their behaviour would change based on the game they were playing. Not only did participants report trash-talking as being normal in specific genres, they also agreed that trash-talking was different between friends and strangers.

Sub-theme C: Trash-talking is different with friends compared to strangers. Aside from trash-talking being a normal part of gaming in specific genres, many of the participants did not view trash-talking with friends as something negative. Wesley described a situation in which trash-talking is normal in the gaming community amongst friends when he said:

I mean... how's he saying it? He could be genuine, just like 'Man you f***ing suck' or 'Man you suck at this game. You should quit while you're ahead' I mean the way I read this [scenario] it kind of reminds me of how I talk with my friends. This is what I would consider banter.

A number of the participants believed that trash-talking doesn't really take place with strangers. As Adam stated, "...Whereas with your friends you'd be joking around and razzing them a bit, but you wouldn't do that to somebody you just met." Interestingly, Seth and Linderman two participants from the same focus group had opposing views on how to trash-talk with friends and strangers. As Seth stated, "If you were trying to do a cooperative thing, and you have a random in there, you are not going to trash-talk the random." Linderman disagreed when he said, "I would. I would absolutely destroy the person. Based on the group of people and how we built the friendship." When talking about trash-talking with strangers Tony stated, "I only respond if it gets personal and [he] starts attacking me... I only fight if they start coming after me. Other than that I don't engage in the conversation with them."

Adam added when discussing the trash-talking scenario presented to them (see Appendix F, question 5):

If you know their relationship, you get a better understanding of where that comment is coming from. So, you would know if the person meant it seriously or if they meant it in a playful, way. Whereas if you don't know them at all, you don't know their relationship at all, it could come across as sincere as opposed to teasing them.

Alex described trash-talking with friends the same as locker room talk when he said,

... Whatever we're playing together it can be talking about the game and then other stuff is kind of like locker room talk. Just some stuff there's probably no way we would say out in public but just when we're talking to each other, it's just become sort of common language.

Jeremy agreed, "There's banter and then there's supportive criticism. Very rarely have I ever experienced something from my group of friends or people that I play with that has been genuinely hateful. It's more just like banter." Linderman also felt that trash-talking with friends

was seen as something fun and normal, “How you treat your friends and how I treat my friends are different. Yeah, we trash-talk to them all the time but we are not really throwing fists at each other. Just throwing teasing that are harmless insults.” Bryan had similar feelings when talking about trash-talking with friends compared to strangers, “I think the role definitely changes when it’s with someone you know. It’s like that friendship sort of banter as opposed to just being mean to random people.” Henry thought that trash-talking was normal if you were friends with the other person, “...If you’re in a comfortable relationship with somebody you poke fun at each other.” Greg used an analogy to describe trash-talking between friends and strangers:

Let’s say you’re walking on the street and while you’re walking you see someone in front of you and they’re waiting at the crosswalk and while he’s waiting a car drives by and the person driving rolls down the window and he swears at the guy, flips his finger, and drives off. If you don’t know them, wow, that was a huge jerk. But if you know that these two are friends, then it’s just a guy making a joke or whatever to his friend.

One participant had a different perspective stating that trash-talking would be inappropriate with friends. Reflecting on a scenario presented to him about gaming friends, Aaron stated:

They are supposed to have a better relationship between them because they spend more time and I would assume they are closer. So yeah, in that situation if I knew they studied in the same classroom, they’re partners, that would surprise me.

Most of the participants viewed trash-talking as something done amongst friends as a form of banter or joking around, not as something negative. Very few participants reported that they trash-talked with complete strangers, and if they did engage in trash-talking with strangers it

was as a form of retaliation. While others may view trash-talking as aggressive behaviour, nearly all participants did not consider that trash-talking was cyberbullying.

Theme 5: The Role of Cyberbullying in Online Gaming

In the interviews and focus groups, trash-talking was ubiquitous when discussing gaming. When asked to reflect on the relationship between trash-talking and cyberbullying, most participants had ideas about what constituted cyberbullying, but all felt it was rare in gaming.

Sam, Charles, and Sean discussed the difference between trash-talking and cyberbullying:

Sean: ...When it comes to trash-talking and cyberbullying in a gaming community, it's not exactly black and white, it's like a grey line between black and white.

Sam: Yeah, I was going to say there's a good fine line between trash-talking and cyberbullying.

Sean: There's some s*** you can't say and there's some s*** you can say.

Charles: That's the thing, to me, it all depends who it is on the other end. Everybody gets hurt by certain words more than others. You could just be doing your normal trash-talking and right there you just kill the whole game for some person. They don't want to play it no more and you're just joking around, playing the game. They might take it as cyberbullying but we're just doing our normal thing.

Within the theme 'the role of cyberbullying in online gaming' two sub-themes emerged: (A) Defining cyberbullying; and (B) Frequency of cyberbullying.

Sub-theme A: Defining cyberbullying. Participants identified a number of characteristics in their definitions of cyberbullying in gaming. Greg identified three key characteristics of cyberbullying: being singled out for attack, multiple consistent negative messages, and repetitive behaviour spanning a long time period. He stated:

...cyberbullying would be when a person singles you out for them to attack. Not just for one message, but for multiple messages that are consistent...and long term. It may not be necessarily restricted to just one game, it may be the same person following you across multiple games or even within the same game but into different sessions.

Adam agreed, "...Let's say one thing happens and for the rest of that session you just don't drop it and you keep bringing it up and you keep getting more and more aggressive towards that person ...” Bryan supports the personalization of the message, “I think it's if you attack someone's person or attack them personally... If it continues after the game, if you're spamming someone's inbox or things like that, I think that's where it goes too far.” Another participant, Sean, agreed that trash-talking becomes cyberbullying when it becomes personal when he said, “If it's a person targeting another individual, calling them down and telling them they're a waste of life...” In the same focus group Sam added to the statement made by Sean, “... if that's happening, that'd be considered cyberbullying.” Jason concurred, “... Putting other people down and trash-talking people would definitely be considered cyberbullying even though it's a part of the gaming culture.”

One exchange between three participants in one of the focus groups added to the definition of cyberbullying:

Sam: ... Following the person for days, logging into your account just to talk s*** and talk them down. See them go online and try to follow them into a lobby and get people to pick on them...

Mike: Or getting a hacker account or something.

Sam: That too, constant hacking.

Hunter: Or if they know some personal stuff about you.

Sam: Yeah that, and they bring up s*** like that.

Mike also adds, “I would say cyberbullying takes it way too far like telling him to kill himself.”

Sean concurred when he added, “And even after the match, just harassing the person.”

Anonymity was another element involved in cyberbullying that the participants agreed on.

Jonathan said:

...No matter who it is on the other side, they could say whatever they want without you really knowing who they are. It's just their gamer name. Definitely, you're free to say whatever you want in the confines of your house. You're free to say whatever and not scared of any repercussions.... So yeah, definitely people can be a bit more aggressive online.

Aaron concurred by stating:

... There are these kinds of masks that you talk behind, you don't talk face-to-face, they don't see you when you're talking. When you're talking to someone face-to-face, you look at the eyes of the person and you get intimidated or you think better of what you're doing. But if you're talking through a microphone without showing your face, you tend to be more irresponsible of what you say and how you say it. So that's probably a reason why cyberbullying develops easier than in real society, in the real world.

Jeremy agreed when he stated, “There's such a big level of anonymous action that people just have free reign of what they want to say... and there's very little repercussions other than reporting said player.” Aaron agreed and added to the anonymity conversation when he said, “The fact that you're behind a name, something powerful, something intimidating, your face is not there, you don't really have responsibility for what you do or what you say. Probably makes you behave in a different way.” Bryan also agreed when he said:

It's that anonymous nature... I think people's personalities also kind of change online, I think it's a lot easier to be toxic online. Like I've definitely experienced that. As soon as I'm not face to face with that person it's a lot easier to be mean to them.

In relation to Facebook, a conversation between two participants supported the influence anonymity has on gaming. Seth stated:

You are a lot more anonymous in gaming because you got a barrier of your user name. So, unless they know that is your ID they can't really personally attack you. As far as they know, they just know what you have shown them or your skill whereas on Facebook [it] is people from your school using that as a tool to bully you.

And Linderman said,

... 'cause when you come on to Facebook, you can publicly shame someone. Gaming is just not, When you cyber text... [as on Facebook] it will be more public and there will be shame and it will be more permanent on there.

Intention was another characteristic involved in cyberbullying that participants discussed. Alex talked about how intention contributed to his definition of cyberbullying when he said:

I think there is the people who will go online with the full intention of trying to just ruin someone's day, week, life, whatever and make it sort of just a living hell, but I think especially in gaming, people will end up becoming... part time or casual cyberbullying or cyberbullying for the day. It's just like a game, things happen, things don't go your way and you are just upset and angry and sometimes people don't know what the best way to get rid of that ...

He further gives a personal example:

I've never been a victim of the full-on cyberbullying, like people who do it just to hurt people ... but I think especially during early, mid-teens, I felt emotionally that I was getting hit by some of the bad-timing person, heat of the moment cyberbullying.

Jeremy expanded on intent when he stated:

Cyberbullying for me, is the intentional infliction of hurtful words. Either picking on some sort of disability or physical disability of the person, threatening them, berating, messaging them directly with the intention of either hurtful words or trying to berate that person. So actions that take thought and provoke certain feelings of either depression or self-doubt or sadness. Anger, frustration, those are all incorporated into that package. So it's somebody who's willing and understands what they're doing and taking action towards another person....

Alex clarified the difference between trash-talking and cyberbullying by the criteria of intention when asked to explain what is happening in a scenario that might occur during gaming:

Sometimes depending on tone and context I would and I wouldn't [consider it cyberbullying]. If the guy was maybe saying it jokingly like 'ah come on man, really you're doing this bad? Why don't you just quit you're bringing us down' I would just see it as a guy just cracking jokes and just trying to be funny. But if it was more like 'man I'm sick of you being this bad, like I don't know why I'm playing with you anymore, you are terrible, you need to quit, delete this game, get rid of it' that I would see more as cyberbullying."

This idea of intention was also reflected by Jeremy and Wesley in this exchange:

Wesley: I'll just say there's a lot of F-bombs, that it, like a lot of F-bombs and nicknames saying 'Badass, Loser, Couch Potato'.

Jeremy: But it's never in the context of malicious intent.

Wesley: Yeah, no....

Jeremy: But that's the important thing.

Seth also understood cyberbullying through intention when he stated, "I think it varies on the person as well as how well you know them because depending on how well you know them, you know how far you can go before you cross the line." Wesley further described the relationship between cyberbullying and trash-talking when he said, "Most of the cyberbullying is trash-talking in the online games." Wesley elaborated on cyberbullying in terms of intention when he said:

As a human being I think I can understand emotional intent. You can hear the tone, you can hear inflection. So banter between my friends like 'oh you're such a f****ing piece of s***, why do you play this game' is said in a different way, like if it's coming from friends in a playful way... then I'll come back with a retort and it'll be fine. But if it's said like you're actually trying to intentionally hurt... I mean it's pretty easy to pick up on that... I think cyberbullying is an element of willful harassment and intention, as trash-talking and banter is just a willful action of busting you're buddy's balls. There's a clear intention with it.

Finally, Adam explained that negative interactions that are in the heat of the moment are not cyberbullying:

if it's in the heat of the moment and you say something but then after the session's done, you part ways and you never talk again. It's not consistent harassment, you're not singling them out, you're not actively trying to hurt their feelings over and over again.

Participants had a distinct understanding of what constitutes cyberbullying in the gaming community especially with regards to repetition, length of time, anonymity, and intention. Cyberbullying is when someone is singled-out and trash talk becomes a personal directed attack. These attacks become increasingly worse over time, are repetitive, go outside the game into social media or other games, and involves harassment after the game. Despite these criteria, although most participants felt that cyberbullying in gaming does occur, they believed it was rare.

Sub-theme B: Frequency of cyberbullying. A few of the participants believed that if cyberbullying occurred in gaming it tended to stay in the game. For instance, Jonathan stated:

You're playing a game, just like when you're playing a sport... People are swearing at you or people are saying bad things but that kind of stays - it's like... what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas, right. What happens during the game...happens there. It stays there...

When provided with a scenario (see Appendix F, question 5) about what might occur during online gaming between friends, Greg said, "...Because Ryan is making this comment once, it's not following him around, giving him negative messages, and after that was said, it's done, it's over, and they can move on."

Jeremy talked about moving on and ignoring negative comments when he said:

I tend just to ignore it. I don't allow it to enter [my mind]...it's so much easier to walk away from that and let them just do what they need to do...whatever you say isn't going to affect me, I'm just gonna walk away from this.

Alex agreed but also provided ideas on who to deal with cyberbullying in gaming, if it occurs:

If you are to hear it, best thing for the victim in that case would be to ignore it, forget about it...It's a small world, there is a very, very high, almost certain chance that you may never talk or hear from this person again.

None of the participants experienced cyberbullying as adolescents or teenagers although most believed it did happen, but infrequently. Wesley had this to add about the occurrence of cyberbullying in gaming, "I mostly am finding all that toxic harassment coming a little bit more from social media, but not from videogames."

In one focus group there was a discussion about the frequency of cyberbullying in gaming,

Tony: I think it's a one-time thing, you send a message and you're done with it.

Henry: Yeah, I think it does happen but... I think what's more common is school, phones, social media. That's probably more.

Bryan: There's toxicity in gaming, ... People don't cross that line I think, often. I'm sure it happens.

Henry: I think for the most part they get distracted with the next game though.

Most participants believed cyberbullying happened mainly and more frequently in social media, not video games. When comparing cyberbullying in gaming to other social media, Linderman stated, "Compared to differences on cyberbullying in online [gaming], it just ends there after you end that conversation with that person that is harassing you or giving you a hard time, but with Facebook it follows you."

Many of the participants felt that as long as the negative comments remained in the game, the trash-talking was not considered cyberbullying. They also felt that cyberbullying in gaming was relatively rare and occurred more often in social media (such as Facebook or Instagram).

Although rare in the gaming community, participants did discuss specific barriers that might prevent teens from reporting cyberbullying.

Theme 6: Barriers to Not Reporting

Participants were asked if they experienced or knew about any barriers to reporting cyberbullying. One barrier that participants mentioned that might make children more inclined not to report cyberbullying is that they do not want to be seen as tattling or be seen as not being masculine. As Alex put it, “I think, especially for guys, they don’t want to be seen as... weak or being described as crybabies. Just toughen up, words can’t hurt me because I’m a guy and that makes me look worse...” When it came to tattling, Linderman said, “...The social stigma of being attacked. Kids are not wanting to tattletale so they are not willing to report them.”

Sean had a different perspective based on his upbringing when it came to telling parents, “If you’re a guy and you try and tell your mom, it’d be the same as trying to tell your parents you’re being picked on at school. They’re just gonna tell you to ‘man up’.”

A second reason they say adolescents may not report being cyberbullied in gaming is the fear of losing gaming privileges. As Jonathan put it:

Well, because they’re not gonna let them play the game. It’s like ‘oh you’re playing a shooting game, that’s very violent... maybe you shouldn’t be playing that’. So that’s probably a barrier; that they would just not be able to play the game anymore.

Another barrier that some of the participants mentioned was that parents do not seem to understand the gaming community. As Aaron stated:

...Fathers usually don’t understand what young people are talking about. For example, if my brother had a problem in that online game, he wouldn’t talk to my father because my father wouldn’t know what he’s talking about. But he would ask me... that’s what young

people think and that's why they feel afraid to tell their parents, because they would say 'turn off the computer' and that's all.

Bryan agreed:

I think any kind of bullying there's always that barrier with parents. I think kids often will just feel like they can't come forward to their parents about that kind of stuff. And then you add on... parents don't understand technology... if people don't understand what's going on.

Wade agreed and added:

I guess parents... most of them are not as close to technology so they're kind of living in a different world than we do. They don't really know how to teach us, relating to those types of devices, they're only used to more personal interactions, more physical...

Participants reported four main reasons why teenagers may not report cyberbullying: (1) they do not want to be seen as less masculine; (2) they do not want to be seen as a tattle-tale; (3) fear of losing gaming or other electronic privileges; and (4) parents and adults do not understand gaming or technology. Many of the participants also reported the importance of educating adults so that they are better informed in how to deal with cyberbullying.

There was a total of 19 participants in the current study who played a variety of genres, on a variety of gaming platforms, playing several days a week and several hours in a day. Through semi-structured interviews six major themes emerged: 1) Reasons for playing online games, both during their adolescence and currently; (2) Understanding gaming culture; (3) The role friendships play in online gaming; (4) The role trash-talking plays in online gaming; (5) The role of cyberbullying in online gaming; and (6) Barriers to reporting cyberbullying. Participants discussed how gaming, both together and online, helped build and maintain friendships as well

as facilitated face-to-face conversations. Participants also felt that it was too difficult to discuss gaming culture as a whole entity as gaming culture was many things and that if researchers were to study gaming culture they would have to start studying smaller elements, such as specific genres. Furthermore, participants discussed how trash-talking was normal in specific genres and that trash-talking occurred primarily amongst friends and rarely with strangers. They viewed trash-talking not as something negative, but as banter, or a way to joke around with friends. While participants reported that trash-talking was ubiquitous in specific genres, nearly all participants felt that it did not constitute cyberbullying. They felt that if trash-talking went beyond the game into other games or onto social media, it would then be considered cyberbullying. Many also claimed that while cyberbullying did happen in the gaming community, they felt that it was rare. The fifth and final chapter, the discussion, will apply the current findings to previous research as well as discuss future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The discussion chapter begins with a summary of the current study as well as the themes that emerged from the participants' interviews and focus groups. The next section will discuss how the theoretical framework evolved from gender socialization theory to the current theoretical framework, social norms theory. The discussion will then focus on how each of the themes in the current study link to previous research. Following this there will be a discussion of the limitations of this study. This chapter will then conclude with recommendations for future research.

The purpose of this retrospective study was to better understand how young adult males describe and understand: (1) their adolescent experiences of online gaming; (2) the role that friendship played in their previous adolescent experiences of online gaming; and (3) "normal" online gaming culture and cyberbullying. Three individual interviews and five focus groups were conducted consisting of 19 young adult male participants between the ages of 18 to 26 years. The questions posed in the interview and focus group guides were identical. There were no differences between the themes that emerged in the interviews and the focus groups. The focus groups were, on average, one and a half times longer in duration than the interviews due to the dialogue amongst participants. Using Braun and Clark's (2006) thematic analysis, six themes emerged: (1) the reasons why participants played online video games; (2) what is gaming culture; (3) the role friendships play in online gaming; (4) the role that trash-talking plays in online gaming; (5) the role of cyberbullying in online gaming; and (6) the barriers to not reporting cyberbullying.

Linking Thematic Analysis to Theory

Initially it was believed that the role of friendships, trash-talking, and how participants viewed cyberbullying in the gaming realm was related to how adolescent boys are gender socialized to be tough, macho, and not show emotions (Cohen, 2001a; Cohen, 2001b; Iman, 1996; Kowalski, 2000; Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 2006; Lenhart et al., 2015; McDiarmid et al., 2016; McNelles & Connolly, 1999; Slaatten et al., 2014; Swain, 1989). The gender socialization model states that boys and girls behave differently based on gender roles that are prescribed for them (Cohen, 2001a). These gender roles are often formulated by adults, such as parents or teachers, as well as by peers, all of whom would point out when a child has done something that does not fit within the gendered norms (Cohen, 2001a). However, when asked directly about the role masculine socialization played in trash-talking and gaming, nearly all participants believed trash-talking had more to do with friendships, and the norms of the game or genre than with masculinity. Therefore, it appears that a theory of social norms may better explain the reasons for how and why certain behaviours are either appropriate or inappropriate in certain gaming genres.

Theoretical Framework – Social Norms Theory

Social norms theory has been studied by a multidisciplinary team of sociologists, anthropologists, economists, legal scholars, political scientists, and psychologists since the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Hechter & Opp, 2001; Perkins, 2014). One of the first researchers of social norms was Emile Durkheim who studied how strangers interact with one another in appropriate manners (Hechter & Opp, 2001; Perkins, 2014). According to Hechter and Opp (2001), subsequent research also examined how social norms partly dictate actions as seen from the famous Asch conformity experiment (1951), the Milgram experiment (1974), and Zimbardo's prison experiment (Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo, 1973). Over the years, norms have

been explained by the use of different terminology such as customs, conventions, roles, identity, and culture. Although a cohesive definition of social norms has proved difficult to develop within the literature, a number of researchers view social norms as behaviour or actions that are regulated by the conceptions of our peers within a specific culture, sub-culture or society (Horne, 2001).

Scholars have differed in terms of their beliefs about how norms are developed and enforced. Some, such as Durkheim (1915), believe that norms must be internalized (Hechter & Opp, 2001). This camp posits that internalizing starts with learning norms and then, over time understanding why those norms are there. Ultimately, the individual accepts the norms as their own viewpoint. For example, you may have been taught to hug and kiss your mom but eventually you internalize why you do it, not because you were told to, but because you want to. In contrast, others believe norms are adhered to because of external motivations (Horne, 2001). Within this philosophy, norms are divided into those that prescribe appropriate behaviour and norms that censure (proscribe) behaviour (Hechter & Opp, 2011). Thus, people do things because they either get a reward for doing the right thing or a punishment for doing the wrong thing. This can be seen in either praise or ridicule from peers within a particular culture (Horne, 2001).

In gaming, participants identified trash-talking as a norm in certain games and certain genres that are likely learned by repeated playing and by sanctions gamers place on each other (Hecter & Opp, 2001; Keltner et al., 2001;McInroy & Mishna, 2017). In this study, gamers expected a certain amount of trash-talking in certain games and genres but not in others. Participants in this study suggested they would be surprised if a gamer was offended by trash-talking in aggressive and competitive games like first person shooter games, and would voice

this opinion. In these situations, if a player viewed trash-talking as cyberbullying, they were considered to be going against the norms. However, participants would tell a fellow gamer to stop trash-talking in learning, building and creative games like Minecraft. Participants also discussed times when their peers would *call them out* or reprimand them if their behaviour was inappropriate or went too far. Participants would argue that players who do not adhere to this normative behaviour should not play those games.

To date no research has been conducted on social norms and online gaming. This would be a valuable direction for future research. Although social norms theory has not yet been applied to gaming research, it appears to be an appropriate model to understand gaming culture. In this study participants spoke about how peers influenced the appropriateness or inappropriateness of specific behaviours in different genres, games, or settings.

Reasons for Gaming

There were a number of reasons participants played online games including for leisure, as a way to reduce stress and boredom, as a form of competition, as a way to escape and become immersed in the game and in another world, as well as a way to maintain friendships. These findings are consistent with the research about why teenagers and young adults play video games (Axelsson & Regan, 2006; Crawford, Gosling, Victoria, & Light, 2011; Klug & Schell, 2006; Raney et al., 2006). According to Raney and colleagues (2006), adolescents play online games as a way to pass the time and to have fun. Many of the participants in this study explained that they played games in order to escape and to become immersed in the game. This is consistent with Klug and Schell's (2006) research which identified that people played games to escape the real world for a brief period of time, just like watching television or a movie. Games allow participants to both become actively immersed in an activity as well as to become a variety of

characters such as a soldier, an athlete, or a superhero. According to Klug and Schell (2006), these actions refer to being able to vicariously become those characters where it would not be possible in the real world.

Competition was another major reason for playing online games and this was supported by previous research that talked about using competition in a structured, healthy way (Klug & Schell, 2006; Raney et al, 2006). Finally, the social element of being able to talk to friends outside the school was also consistent with both the participants in this study as well as previous research on why adolescents play online games (Raney et. al., 2006). It would be interesting to identify in future research if different genres or games influenced the reasons teenagers and young adults played games.

Gaming Culture

Very little research has been conducted on gaming culture (McInroy & Mishna, 2017). One of the comments McInroy and Mishna (2017) made about future research in their earlier study, was that it was important to unpack and better understand what gaming culture was. Many of the participants in their study reported that the culture of gaming tolerated and supported negative talk that in other cyber contexts would be considered cyberbullying. They encouraged follow-up research to examine further why participants in the gaming community in their study did not view negative talk as cyberbullying, even though it fit their definitional criteria of cyberbullying (McInroy & Mishna, 2017). When participants in the current study were asked to better describe and explain gaming culture, the majority of participants agreed that the term gaming culture was too broad and compared it to trying to define American culture under one main idea. Participants discussed the importance of better understanding specific genres or even specific games in order to understand gaming culture. Participants not only discussed

investigating specific genres or games but also the need to examine competitive and non-competitive games, as well as the culture of different gaming platforms (such as Xbox, PlayStation, PC or Nintendo). This finding was reflected in the current study participants' experiences and beliefs about friendship formation. They talked about forming friends within a community of gamers playing certain games in certain genres. That they experienced and accepted and partook in trash-talking was also part of their sense of connection and understanding of each other. They felt they spoke the same language. This extended as well to their experience and understanding of cyberbullying in gaming. Similar to the participants in McInroy and Mishna's study (2017), the traditional definition of cyberbullying was not seen as a good fit with their experiences. For the current study participants, applying the label cyberbullying to trash-talking in certain gaming genres was a misnomer and reflected a lack of understanding of genre culture in gaming.

The Role Friendships Play in Online Gaming

Friendship development in online gaming figured strongly in the lives of the participants interviewed. As discussed with regard to gaming culture, participants spoke about how they developed friendships with others in the context of specific genres and games. Not only did participants form friendships with people online, but many reported that gaming helped maintain and build friendships with people they knew before gaming as well as people they met online. This is consistent with the work of others who claim that online gaming helps improve the quality of friendships (Di Gennaro, & Dutton, 2007; Lenhart et al., 2015; Ng & Wiemer-Hastings, 2005; Peters & Malesky, 2008; Rigby & Ryan, 2011). For instance, the Pew Internet Survey reported that 36% of all adolescents form friendships through online gaming; the majority being males (Lenhart et al., 2015). Young (2009) pointed out that a large part of online

gaming is about developing social relationships. Peters and Malesky (2008) reported that online relationships are just as important as offline relationships (Peters & Malesky, 2008) which mirrored the experiences of participants in this study.

Many of the participants agreed that a problem with meeting friends online was that if you stopped playing the game there was a good chance you would lose contact with those individuals. As a result, a number of participants agreed that it was important to connect while talking and texting each other about other topics aside from the game, in order to maintain those friendships with online-only friends. Participants also reported that interacting with friends online was different than interacting with strangers. However, there was disagreement about how this occurs. Some participants thought that friendships were stronger with people they knew before gaming, and that gaming helped improve these friendships. While other participants who didn't game with old friends felt that forming online gaming friendships was easier and these friendships were stronger because they found it difficult to interact with people face-to-face. This is consistent with findings from other researchers which indicate that communicating with friends online helps improve friendships (Guan & Subrahmanyam, 2009; Hinduja, & Patchin, 2015; McGonial, 2011; Mishna et al., 2010; Peter et al., 2005; Tokunaga, 2010; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007) as well as helps overcome shyness (Mishna, McLuckie et al., 2009; Peter et al., 2005; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). The participants in this study used gaming as a mechanism to help communicate and converse with others, which echoed research that found that males often develop friendships through activities and conversations rather than conversation alone (Inman, 1996; McDiarmid et al, 2016; Swain, 1989; Walker, 1994). In a study that examined behaviours and intimacy levels amongst adolescents, McNelles and Connolly (1999) discovered that although boys and girls did not differ in terms of the amount of intimacy they exhibited; boys

had a tendency to score higher than girls on activity-centered intimacy while girls scored higher than boys on both topics of conversation and self-disclosure. This link between activities and conversation was borne out in the current study of all male participants. Determining how this relationship would play out with female gamers would be an interesting comparison.

The Role of Trash-Talking in Gaming

Participants used a variety of terms for trash-talking including banter, saying mean things, joking, being playful, razzing, teasing, psych-outs, locker room talk, harsh words, negative comments, and s*** talking. While exploring the role of friendships and communicating with friends in online gaming, participants spoke about how trash-talking was a common activity they engaged in. There were many reasons why participants would trash-talk including as a way to bond with their team, as a form of constructive criticism, as a way to increase competition, and as a form of entertainment. Although no research has specifically investigated trash-talking in gaming, these findings are consistent with others who investigated the purpose of trash-talking in other areas, such as in sports or in friendships (Beck et al., 2007; Barnett et al. 2004; Keltner et al., 2001; Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 2006; LoConto & Roth, 2005). LoConto and Roth's (2005) study examined, using interviews, trash-talking in sports amongst 50 male and female college athletes from a variety of sports including football, basketball, baseball, soccer, track and field, cross country skiing, and tennis. Although most athletic institutions claim that athletes should play with honour and respect, many of the participants in their study reported that trash-talking came with specific rules that they must adhere to. Some of the most observed rules included: (a) do not take trash-talking off the field, (b) never talk about someone's mother or significant other in their lives, (c) never let the opposing team or player see the trash-talk get under the skin, (d) in

rougher games (such as football or basketball) players are encouraged to trash-talk, and (e) the trash-talk needs to be creative.

In the current study, consistent with social norms theory, participants had similar rules to follow in online gaming, particularly with regards to keeping the trash-talking within the game and that it is encouraged in specific genres, especially violent ones such as sports or first-person shooter games. Furthermore, participants in the current study also mentioned that creativity played a significant role in trash-talking. Given that online gaming can be as competitive as sports, it makes sense that they share similar rules with regards to trash-talking.

Trash-talking not only occurs in competition, but often occurs in friendships as well. One study on friendships and trash-talking conducted by McDiarmid and colleagues (2016) examined the role of insults in same-sex friendships amongst seven young adults in their mid-twenties. They discovered that insulting friends was a way to show and reinforce closeness, and served as tokens of affection. Many of the participants in their study reported that the teasing and insulting would only occur when they were in private with other friends, and rarely in public, as they reported it might not be culturally acceptable in some circumstances. They also claimed that they would not tease people who they did not feel close to, as that would seem rude and inappropriate. Similarly, participants in the current study conveyed that they were able to trash-talk with friends because they were close and that trash-talking was a way to show affection towards other players who they were connected to. Additionally, participants reported that they would not trash-talk in other environments such as in public places and would rarely trash-talk strangers because it would break the norms of the game. The only exception to this rule was if a random stranger started trash-talking them. It was as if the random was resetting the norms of the game by trash-talking them. They would engage and trash-talk to maintain their power and position in the game

which they referred to as retaliation. Although rare in gaming, according to the participants in this study, this notion of retaliation is consistent in cyberbullying research in which individuals affected by bullying or cyberbullying would retaliate against someone online (Kowalski et al., 2008; Law, Shapka, Domene et al., 2012; Rafferty & Ven, 2014).

Nearly all participants mentioned that trash-talking was seen as a normal part of gaming, but only if it was appropriate in a specific genre or game. This is consistent with McInroy and Mishna's (2017) study that examined cyberbullying in gaming. While the qualitative portion of their study discovered that trash-talking and the use of power and aggression was normal and ubiquitous in gaming, the current study went further by uncovering that trash-talking was only normal in specific genres or games. The participants in this study also agreed that specific genres and games often dictate the norms of what is and what is not appropriate trash-talking. This supports social norms theory in that both prescribed behaviours that are appropriate and expected and proscribed, those that are not acceptable and are centred are integral to the theory (Hechter and Opp, 2011). Within specific gaming genres and specific games not only was trash-talking accepted and expected, in most cases it was encouraged that participants *dish out* as well as *take* trash-talk. For example, many of the participants agreed that if they were to play a first-person shooter game (such as Call of Duty), trash-talking in that sub-culture would be seen as appropriate. Whereas if someone were to trash-talk in a building or creating game (such as Minecraft), it would be inappropriate in that genre. In fact, many of the participants changed the way they behaved based on the game they were playing, despite playing with the same group of people.

Additionally, the current study went further into describing the culture of trash-talking and its impact on the participants. Participants spoke about the times when trash-talking was seen

as a *heat of the moment* type of activity in which a negative comment was made only once and then forgotten about. Participants used the term *one and done* to describe how trash-talking could happen as a *heat of the moment* issue. Participants explained how they knew when trash-talking was used to vent or let off steam and in their gaming worlds this did not constitute cyberbullying. Even though in social media cyberbullying, repetition does not always mean the amount of times something negative occurs, since a disparaging comment said once but seen by many is still considered repetitive cyberbullying, in gaming this is not the case (Grigg, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2013). This venting by participants in the current study was considered a *one off* and not repeated and as such did not meet the cyberbullying criteria of repetition. Furthermore, although trash-talking can occur frequently in certain genres, participants claimed that as long as the comments remained in the game it was not considered harassment. Some of the participants even mentioned that if they made a comment that went further than they intended, they would often apologize for their behaviour afterwards. Not only did participants feel that trash-talking was normal in specific genres or games, or that trash-talking could be negative words used in the heat of the moment, nearly all participants also agreed that trash-talking occurred primarily with friends and rarely with randoms (or strangers). This is inconsistent with McInroy and Mishna's (2017) study in which participants trash-talked or were recipients of aggressive comments from strangers. The anonymity inherent in playing with strangers disinhibited McInroy and Mishna's participants. Many of the participants mentioned that they would only trash-talk with randoms if the random person started it first. Furthermore, since trash-talking is done primarily amongst friends, trash-talking was not seen as cyberbullying, but seen as banter, razzing, teasing, joking around, or *psych-outs*.

In Yiddish, the word *kibitzing* encapsulates the findings about trash-talking in this study. The term *kibitz* means to *make fun*, but in a loving or endearing way; it is not meant to hurt. Many participants agreed that if you had a strong enough relationship with someone, you were allowed to make fun of them because they knew you. The notion of boys trash-talking with friends as a way to have fun with peers, is consistent with the literature on males trash-talking in sports, hanging out, and in and other activities (Beck et al., 2005; Kowalski, 2000; Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 2006; McDiarmid et al., 2016; Messner, 2006; Pelfrey & Webber, 2014; Slatten et al., 2014).

Finally, participants reported that trash-talking did not affect them emotionally. This is consistent with McInroy and Mishna's (2017) study in which many of their participants also agreed that trash-talking did not affect them emotionally. Most of the participants in their study as well as in this current one said they would just 'shrug off' the negative comments. Furthermore, participants in this study reported that it was much easier to ignore negative comments in online gaming than it was to try and ignore it on other social media such as Facebook. Perceiving trash-talking in certain genres in gaming as normal and expected impacted participants' reactions and experiences of the negativity inherent in the comments; whereas in social media negative personal comments are not acceptable, expected or normative and are perceived as hurtful and harmful. In gaming, participants did not interpret trash-talking as intentional to hurt or harm the recipient, but instead the intention was to win the game. This finding is inconsistent with the current definitions of cyberbullying that include intentionality as a key variable (Tokunaga, 2010). According to the three rules of intention (Smith et al., 2013) trash-talking in gaming does not meet the criteria of intention since the victims of trash-talking do not experience harm, the perpetrators that are engaging in trash-talking do not intend to harm,

and others do not deem the action to likely cause harm. Similar to Nocentini and colleague's (2010) study in which participants reported that if intent was not present, adolescents perceived negative comments to be a joke, participants in the current study did not view trash-talking as negative but as a way to have fun with friends.

The Role Cyberbullying Plays in Online Gaming

Similar to the research on defining cyberbullying (Baas et al., 2013; Cuadrado-Gordillo & Antelo, 2016; Grigg, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Holfeld & Leadbeater, 2015; Kowalski, et al., 2014; Kowalski et al., 2008; Law, Shapka, Domene et al., 2012; Menesini et al., 2013; Nocentini et al., 2010; Pieschl et al, 2015; Pieschl et al, 2013; Vandebosch & Cleemput, 2008), the participants in the current study agreed on key concepts of cyberbullying including anonymity, consistency, occurring over a period of time, and an intention to hurt. Many participants believed that trash-talking has a purpose, which is to win and make an opponent lose, as opposed to cyberbullying which can cause lasting harm. When it came to defining cyberbullying within the context of online gaming the majority of participants thought that if trash-talking remained in the game, it was not considered cyberbullying. They claimed that if trash-talking went beyond the game and if someone followed you to different games, or gaming sessions, and beyond (such as attacking you on social media) then it was considered cyberbullying. Although there may be multiple acts of trash-talking, as long as it stayed in the game it was not considered cyberbullying. This is inconsistent with the characteristics of repeatability over time that are part of the most frequently used definitions of cyberbullying (Grigg, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2013). Participants felt that if they were recipients of trash-talking from random players and the trash-talking could potentially be classified as cyberbullying, the trash-talking would not negatively affect them anyway because they did not

know the individuals saying these offensive remarks. Anonymity made it easier to brush off the negative comments. This is consistent with McInroy and Mishna's (2017) study where their participants reported that trash-talking with strangers did not impact them. This finding is inconsistent with the anonymity criteria in the definition of cyberbullying (Li, 2005) and the findings from some research that claims that when negative comments are made anonymously, they are more hurtful (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2014; Mishna et al., 2010; Nocentini et al., 2010). In this study anonymity worked in a positive way, making it less likely that negative remarks from strangers would be taken as abusive or hurtful.

Additionally, participants in the current study felt that if trash-talking occurred amongst friends it was considered banter or having fun, and not considered harassment or cyberbullying. Participants in this study were given a consistent definition of cyberbullying and most felt that trash-talking did not meet the criteria of cyberbullying; they considered their experiences with trash-talking as something separate and independent of cyberbullying. These findings mirror those of other researchers who claim that trash-talking is different than cyberbullying (McInroy & Mishna, 2017). Finally, participants in this study reported that cyberbullying in the gaming community did happen, the frequency of it was rare, and that cyberbullying was more common in social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, as well as others. These results are contrary to the limited research we have on cyberbullying and online gaming which indicates that cyberbullying occurs frequently in gaming with prevalence rates ranging from 3% to 64% (Ballard & Welch, 2017; Frying et al., 2015; Li & Pustaka, 2017). The problem with many of these studies is that they used various means of measuring and defining cyberbullying in online gaming. It is unclear what definitions Frying and colleagues (2015) and Li and Pustaka (2017) used to determine prevalence rates as they did not clarify whether they were measuring

cyberbullying or trash-talking variables. Prevalence rates could be suspect given the limitations of the survey method which offers little opportunity to explore the responses in detail. It may be that survey respondents felt compelled to report cyberbullying behaviour due to the way survey questions were phrased.

The rates of cyberbullying may very well be inflated and in reality, be measuring the prevalence of trash-talking, which is ubiquitous in gaming. For example, in Ballard and Welch's (2017) study, although their definition of cyberbullying did not include behaviour done in "a friendly, playful, or competitive way" (p.475) many of the variables examined could have been considered trash-talking. These variables included name calling, use of profanity, and being threatened. The only study that indicated similar results to the current study was the study by McInroy and Mishna (2017) which reported that cyberbullying in online gaming was rare. In their research they identified aggressive behaviours excessive to the game as cyberbullying but gamers did not concur. The gamers saw these behaviours as trash-talking and this likely contributed to the prevalence of cyberbullying in online gaming being rare. The limited research on cyberbullying and gaming seems to indicate that the researchers who examine this phenomenon and those who are actively engaged in it (gamers and the participants in the current study) have different perspectives on what constitutes cyberbullying, which in turn results in different classifications of it. For example, researchers will report that certain behaviours such as name calling or the use of offensive language is considered cyberbullying, but to many gamers this is considered trash-talking and not considered cyberbullying unless the harassment is taken beyond the game and into other domains such as social media.

Barriers to not Reporting

Although participants did not claim that cyberbullying occurred frequently in gaming, they did report barriers teenagers had in reporting cyberbullying. These reasons did not differ from previous research on barriers (Ackers, 2012; Agaston et al., 2007; Baas et al., 2013; Frisen et al., 2014; Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Mishna, McLuckie et al., 2009; Mishna, Sinai et al., 2009; Mitchell et al., 2016; Parris et al., 2012; Pisch, 2010). The common reasons were not wanting to be seen as a tattler or less masculine, and fear of losing gaming or other electronic privileges. Similarly, participants agreed that one of the largest barriers to reporting was that they felt parents or other adults did not understand gaming technology and thus would be unable to help deal with cyberbullying (Allen, 2012; Baas et al., 2013; Bryce & Fraser, 2013; Compton et al., 2014; Frisen et al., 2014; Grigg, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2014; Mishna, McLuckie et al., 2009; Navarro & Serna, 2016). Participants explained that reporting cyberbullying to peer friends and siblings would be more helpful than reporting to parents, teachers and other adults because they would understand the context, not punish them, empathize with them, and be able to offer useful strategies to manage the cyberbullying. Finally, participants claimed that aside from contacting the gaming platforms (such as Microsoft or PlayStation) to invoke sanctions, participants did not report instances of cyberbullying in gaming due to the lack of repercussions for the perpetrators.

This qualitative study of 19 young adults on their online gaming experiences identified a number of themes including the importance of gaming to friendship formation, the importance of clarifying gaming culture, and the role of trash-talking in gaming. The use of social norms theory to understand the findings helped clarify the meaning and role of trash-talking and community in gaming. Participants' experiences of trash-talking and cyberbullying proved illuminating, raising

questions about the use of cyberbullying definitions in previous research. The findings identify questions and challenges for future research on online gaming.

Limitations

The current study examined young adult male gamers' retrospective experiences of gaming culture, the role of friendships, trash-talking and cyberbullying. Male gamers were chosen due to the large percentage of males who play online games. Gaming is also the most common way boys and young adult males communicate with friends outside of the school environment. Thus, this study specifically and purposefully chose not to investigate the experiences of female gamers in this study.

This study had a number of limitations that need to be addressed. These include recruitment, age range of the participants, interviews compared to focus groups, focus group size, and the use of a retrospective methodology. I recruited participants who self-identified as gamers both currently and in their teenage years. The use of self-reports limits the study's transferability as there was a wide range of self-identification among gamers. This ranged from gaming one hour a day to four or more hours a day as well as ranging from one day a week to 4 or more days a week. Furthermore, they self-identified as gamers based on the type(s) of gaming platforms they played as well as the different genres. In a future study it would be beneficial to offer participants a set of defined gaming pattern parameters to choose from to self-identify their gaming behaviour, to enhance other researchers' abilities to repeat this study or apply the findings to their populations (transferability). Another limitation to the current study was the inconsistent use of focus groups. It was often difficult to gather five to eight focus group participants at the same time. As a result, instead of obtaining three focus groups of five to eight participants I had a combination of three individual interviews, four focus groups of two to four

participants, and only one focus group that met the criteria of having five to eight participants. The benefit of focus groups was that participants had the advantage of hearing others' remarks and being able to reflect on these and potentially change their remarks or add new ideas and insights to their thoughts. At the beginning of this study it was believed that participants would find it easier to talk about a sensitive topic, such as cyberbullying, within focus groups rather than in individual interviews. Ultimately, this assumption was incorrect, as participants spoke openly in both interviews and focus groups. This may be due to participants not identifying trash-talking as cyberbullying and thus not a sensitive topic to discuss.

It is possible that the data would be richer in detail had more focus groups taken place as the group discussions offered participants the opportunity to bounce ideas off one another. In this study recruitment of five to eight participants was difficult. The ability of future researchers to select a fuller focus group sample would be enhanced by a longer period of recruitment and different recruitment strategies such as linking participation to academic credit. A third limitation in the study was the age range that was used in recruiting participants. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 26 years. This range captures individuals who have just graduated from high school as well as those who are in university or have completed a university or college program. The different stages of life may have impacted the narratives as some participants were more reflective and/or reactive than others. The ability to recollect experiences of gaming as adolescents and teenagers was different for participants at each end of the age range. Those just out of high school had a much shorter time span to recall their experiences than those up to nine years past high school. Additionally, when participating in the focus groups and interviews, it was, at times challenging for the researcher to know whether participants were talking about

current game play or past experiences. This is also a limitation inherent in using a retrospective methodology.

Future Research

Research on gaming culture and the role of friendships, trash-talking, and cyberbullying within this realm is currently somewhat uncharted territory. This study attempted to shed some light on the experiences and attitudes of young males in the gaming community. Given that this study begins to answer some of those questions regarding gaming culture there are a number of directions for future research. The first direction for future research involves studying female gamers. Although this study recruited male participants based on the idea that the majority of gamers are male, I believe it is important to further understand the experiences of female gamers and to investigate whether or not they have similar views as males on gaming culture, friendships, trash-talking, and cyberbullying.

Another contribution to future research on the study of gaming culture is to sample from the same age group (i.e., all 20 year olds), as opposed to the wide age range used in the current study. Having a more homogeneous sample would build confidence in the findings as the limitations previously discussed about recall and being at different stages of life, would be addressed. For example, participants from the same age cohort would be more likely to experience technological changes in gaming platforms in a similar fashion than a group of participants five years older than them. Future research on gaming culture would benefit from taking this into consideration. Consequently, I also believe it is important to investigate alternative ways of recruiting participants, possibly through online forums. Offering the opportunity to use skype or other similar web interviews would potentially expand the sample pool. Furthermore, it might be interesting to develop a survey questionnaire based on the

findings about gaming culture, the role of friendships, trash-talking, and cyberbullying and administer it to a larger population. Additionally, future research should also start investigating adolescents' experiences of gaming culture. While the current study examined young adult males' retrospective experiences because it was thought that they would be better able to articulate their experiences with some distance; I think it is important to study how adolescents experience gaming culture and report on it while they are participating in it.

The next area of recommended future research involves data that was collected in this study but not emphasized because the concepts were not the focus of the current study. This area included opinions of participants on strategies to assist in reporting cyberbullying. Participants in this study talked about the need to educate adults about gaming technology and immersing technology in general as ignorance made it difficult for gamers to talk to adults. The participants in the current study discussed that educating adults on gaming culture may help them understand the gaming community. Therefore, a future study could involve studying the impact of a psychoeducational or educational intervention for parents on how technology and gaming works and some strategies for parents on how to deal with inappropriate online behaviour. Limited research has investigated the benefits of online gaming. Some of the data collected from the interviews and focus groups in this study dealt with specific social skills participants gained by playing video games such as overcoming shyness, learning turn-taking, and other social skills development. This should be further explored with adolescent gamers. Data was also collected on how to build resiliency in cyberbullying encounters. A number of research studies and programs have been developed over the years to study and to help stop or reduce the occurrence of cyberbullying. This current research points to the importance of studies on building resiliency among adolescents.

The final area of future research involves studies of gaming culture. There is limited research about gaming culture and while the current study is a start there still remain unanswered questions. Participants in this study all agreed that there is no such thing as ‘gaming culture’; it is too broad to understand in that way. In order to better understand gaming culture future research should investigate sub-genres of gaming culture or break it down even further by investigating the culture of specific games. While participants did not believe cyberbullying in gaming happened frequently, I believe it is important to study how cyberbullying occurs in specific games and genres and compare these findings to those of other online mediums.

Conclusions

The current study opens the door to understanding the role of friendships, trash-talking, and cyberbullying in gaming. Key among the findings is that gaming culture is complex and variable. The study discovered how adolescents formed and developed friendships, both with online-only friends as well as friends they knew before online gaming. The study unpacked the understanding of trash-talking; how, why and with whom it was done. Finally, this study examined cyberbullying in the context of online gaming. The findings from this study lead the way in exploring how to deconstruct the term cyberbullying in gaming. Currently, cyberbullying is used as an umbrella term but according the participants in this research this may be a misnomer in the gaming world. They did not see or believe that trash-talking is a form of cyberbullying and as such this qualitative study raises interesting questions for researchers, practitioners and the general public.

Appendix A. *Summary of Existing Qualitative Cyberbullying Research*

Author (date)	Research Question	CB Definition	Methodology	Methods	Sample Size (gender)	Results
Ackers (2012)	To gain an understanding of student's knowledge and views of CB and any personal experiences with CB	N/A	Exploratory case study design using students as researchers	Qualitative/Quantitative study -Questionnaire 13 Questions (5 closed and 8 open ended questions) and 3 focus groups 45 minutes in length	325 students (grade 7-9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most children have heard of CB but not many have been victim to it • Difference between joking and CB consists of time/number of messages and hurtful/threatening comments • Would not report CB due to fear, making the situation worse, and embarrassment
Agaston, Kowalski, & Limber (2007)	Impact of CB on students and need for prevention messages	Using the internet or other digital technologies such as cellular phones and personal digital assistants (PDA) to be intentionally mean or to harass others	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus groups separated by gender • Single focus group 45 min in length 	148 Middle and high school students (ages 12-17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students – particularly female students viewed CB as a problem but rarely discussed in school • Students do not see school personnel as helpful

Allen (2012)	Explore how text messages are viewed by students and staff as it relates to social conflict, aggression and bullying in a high school setting		Grounded theory	Mixed –Methods study Interviews and focus groups	68 Adolescents (ages 14-19) participated in focus groups and interviews & 38 staff participated in interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text messaging was universal and the act of gossiping and rumour spreading was common amongst adolescents • ‘Drama’ often occurs related to texting • Texting is secretive from adults
Baas, DeJong, & Drossaert (2013)	Explore children’s perspectives on CB	N/A	Participatory research design	Weekly group sessions (6 week duration) consisting of 7 children in each group	28 elementary students (ages 11-12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students found it difficult to distinguish CB from innocent pranks • Cyberbullies may have different motives • Victimized children found it difficult to ask for help
Bryce, & Fraser (2013)	Examined the perceptions and experiences of cyberbullying of children and adolescents	N/A	N/A	18 focus groups	108 (ages 9-19)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CB is seen as problematic and serious but relatively routine; as part of growing up with technology • Highlighted the relationship between technology and behaviour/

Cassidy, Brown, & Jackson (2012)	Explores teachers', school administrators', and school counsellors'/youth workers' experiences and perceptions of CB among students and explore ways schools can be more proactive in promoting respectful online behaviours	N/A	N/A	Interviews	17 Educators consisting of 2 principals, 2 vice-principals, 2 youth workers, 5 teachers, and 4 counsellors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many educators reported few cases on CB in their classrooms or schools • Only 1 developed a curriculum to address CB issues • Lack of interest in learning the results of the study • School's focus on technology does not lead to educating teachers about its use or misuse
Compton, Campbell, & Mergler (2014)	Examine the views of teachers, parents, and students on what CB and bullying are and the motivation of cyberbullies	Defined bullying as intentionally harmful and repeated behaviour carried out by one or more persons against someone unable to defend themselves. (the same definition was provided for CB)	N/A	Focus groups	35 participants consisting of 11 teachers (age 25-60), 12 parents (Mean age = 41.1), and 12 students (ages 13-15)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differences between students, teachers, and parents immersed in the criteria of CB including power, intent to harm, motivation and anonymity

Frisen, Berne, & Marin (2014)	Investigate coping strategies for how students deal with CB and if there are any age and gender differences in coping strategies		Survey with 1 open ended question	694 students (ages 10-12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The most common coping strategies included telling an adult but few reporting telling a friend, confronting the bully and ignoring • Differences in coping strategies were found between age and gender • Younger students and girls were more likely to tell a parents • Boys were more likely to retaliate in an offline forum 	
Grigg (2010)	Examined the definitions and concepts of CB	Definition emerged in analysis	Phenomenological approach	Focus groups and individual interviews	32 young people and adults (ages 8-54)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Themes that emerged included: all students had basic media knowledge • Media abuse included negative behaviour on the internet such as aggression, fraud, unwanted communication, rumour spreading,

						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> hacking, threats unwanted phone calls, harassment, • Invasion of privacy, control issues, and • Definitions of CB were vague, inadequate and restrictive
Law, Shapka, Domene, & Gagne (2012)	Explored if online aggressive acts were motivated by proactive and/or reactive reasons	N/A	N/A	Mixed-Methods study using surveys and interview data	733 adolescents completed surveys while 15 adolescents conducted interviews (ages 10-18)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both survey and interview data revealed that adolescents perceive own behaviour as reactive and that the behaviour was justified • Interview data further explain that adolescents perceive other people's aggressive acts as proactive
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Maher (2008)	Investigates young people's online interactions with a focus on instances of CB	N/A	Ethnographic, case study and grounded theory	Observations, field notes, individual and group interviews, discussions with teachers, and recordings of online interactions	22 students (ages 11-12) and 1 teacher in one classroom over a 12 month period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender differences in CB both at home and school • Different types of CB • Boys demonstrated a desire for control and power while interacting online

McInroy & Mishna (2017)	Experience and impact of gaming and cyberbullying on youth	Use of technology to engage in bullying consisting of direct and indirect aggression and takes the form of physical, verbal, psychological, or relational behaviours	Grounded Theory Qualitative Content Analysis	Mixed-Method study with in-person and telephone interviews	57 students (grade 4-10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 themes related to online gaming emerged: aggression (characterized online gaming culture); anonymity in gaming contributed to aggression; participants did not consider aggressiveness as cyberbullying; participant responses to aggressive behaviour
Mishna, McLuckie & Sinai (2009)	To understand cyber abuse from children's and youth's perspectives	CB includes the use of email, cell phones, and internet sites to threaten, harass, embarrass, exclude or damage reputations and friendships	Phenomenological approach	Thematic analysis of anonymous posts	Children and youth (ages 11-24)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussed the importance of the internet and communication technology for socialization; the forms, extent, and impact of cyber abuse; potential of online dangers, and fear of disclosing to adults
Mishna, Sinai, & Solomon (2009)	Explore technology, virtual relationships, and	Definition emerged in analysis	Grounded theory	7 focus groups	38 students (ages 10-13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five themes emerged: technology being

CB from the perspectives of students

embraced at younger ages and becoming the dominant form of communication; various definitions and views of CB; factors unique to CB; types of CB; and issues in disclosing to adults

Naruskov, Luik, Nocentini, & Menesini (2012)

Examine how students perceive and define CB based on 5 criteria of CB and 4 types of CB behaviour

CB define according to 5 criteria and 4 types of CB behaviour

N/A

2 Focus groups (age 12 and age 15) discussing various scenarios followed by a questionnaire

20 Students

- Adolescents differed on the 5 criteria of CB and the 4 types of behaviour based on the severity of the scenario
- Different terms for CB created disagreements among participants
- Meaning of the 5 criteria differed based on the CB scenarios
- Spanish students are using the Anglo-Saxon term for CB but their understanding is different from the

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Navarro & Serna (2016)

Do youth perceive CB as a different phenomenon from bullying, reasons that motivate CB, and the role that adults play

Any conduct done via digital or electronic media by an individual or group that intends to harm

Participatory research

18 Focus groups consisting of 6-8 participants

108 children and adolescents (ages 10-16)

or bother others where perpetrators can remain anonymous and can be repeated through various digital tools

one the researchers used

- Not all youths know what CB is
- The importance of parents' role in intervening in CB
- The importance of training youth and adults in responsible technology use and skills
- Definition of CB vary amongst different European countries

Nocentini et al. (2010)

Examine students' perception of the term used to label CB; the different behaviours representing CB; and the criteria used for defining CB

CB involves intentional harm, repetition over time, a power imbalance between victim and perpetrator(s) as well as anonymity and publicity

N/A

9 focus groups

70 adolescents

Parris, Varjas Meyers, & Cutts (2012)

Provide an in depth examination of coping strategies with CB

Definition emerged in analysis

Ethnographic study

Open-Ended interviews

20 Adolescents (15-19)

- Coping themes included: reactive coping, preventative coping, and no way to prevent CB

Paul, Smith, & Blumberg (2012)

Explore the use of Quality Circles

CB is considered

Case study

5 QC groups

30 Adolescents (grades 7-8)

- At the end of the year adolescents

	(QC) as an effective means of gathering information on bullying and CB in schools and how these might have changed over 1 year. It also examine the use of QC in empowering students in producing solutions	similar to indirect bullying in that victims are targeted through mobile phones and the internet		Semi-structured interviews 20 minutes in length		reported that the term of CB, attitudes towards it and new terms being used change over time
Pelfrey & Webber (2014)	Exploring the actualization, nature and impact of CB on both victims and perpetrators	Definition emerged in analysis	N/A	4 Focus groups consisting of 5-8 students and 40-45 minutes in length	24 students (grades 6-12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposals for dealing with bullying and CB were similar Adolescents view CB differently than traditional bullying CB is connected with gossip and rumors Outcomes of CB participation vary widely Students' comments complicate the development of a clear definition of CB
Rafferty & Vander- Ven (2014)	How are CB and online aggression experienced and understood by both	Repeated, unwanted, hurtful, harassing, and/or	Symbolic Interactionism	Surveys with open-ended questions	221 Undergraduate students (ages 18-24)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Three prominent motivations for cyberbullies and online aggression were found: cyber-

Smith et al. (2008)	<p>perpetrators and victims</p> <p>Purpose of focus groups was to test survey findings on the nature and prevalence of CB</p>	<p>threatening behaviour through electronic communication</p> <p>Olweus' (1991) definition of bullying a person is being bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons" (p.9) followed by a statement of CB as including 7 media outlets</p>	N/A	<p>Focus groups</p> <p>Semi-structured interviews</p>	<p>47 children and adolescents (ages 11-15) used to test survey findings on the nature and prevalence of CB</p>	<p>sanctions, power struggles, and entertainment (trolling)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus groups discovered students think there is a higher incidence of CB than found in the survey • Students believed girls would be more involved in CB but survey showed no gender differences • Students believed cyberbullies engage in the behaviour primarily for entertainment • While some believed anonymity could make CB worse, many felt the impact was similar to traditional bullying, while others believed it was less harmful
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Spears, Slee,
Owens, &
Johnson (2009)

Explore the human
dimension of
knowledge,
understanding, and
experiences of
covert bullying and
CB

Narrative

Written stories by
participants were
analyzed using thematic
analysis

36 participants
20 students
(ages 12-18)
6 school
counsellors
10 teachers

- Concerns over the definition and understanding of covert, overt aggression and CB
- Interaction between overt and covert behaviours
- Understanding the human dimension and impact of CB created anger and sadness and disrupted relationships
- Students indicated a clear sense of helplessness and there was a power difference in CB
- For CB to occur it should include the following criteria: intent to hurt (by the perpetrator) and perceived as hurtful (by the victim); must be repetitive both online and offline; and there must be a power imbalance

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Vanderbosch, &
Van Cleemput
(2008)

To gain deeper
insight into the
perspectives of
children and
adolescents views
of cyberbullying

Definition
emerged in
analysis

N/A

53 Focus groups

279 Children
and adolescents
(Ages10-18)

- For CB to occur it should include the following criteria: intent to hurt (by the perpetrator) and perceived as hurtful (by the victim); must be repetitive both online and offline; and there must be a power imbalance

*CB = Cyberbullying

Appendix B: Recruitment Bulletin

Gaming Culture Among Young Adult Males

Bulletin Research Studies Posted [DATE]

I am seeking **Male gamers (ages 18-25)** to join a focus group discussion on gaming that is being held on [DATE]. If you would like to participate, you would only need to attend one session. If you are interested in participating and these times/dates do not work with your schedule, please message me and I will try and accommodate you.

This research is looking to understand your thoughts and opinions on gaming culture, which includes questions relating to friendship formation, gaming communities, and how people communicate with each other while gaming. Participating in this focus group will take approximately 60 minutes of your time. Due to the nature of this group activity, the researcher cannot guarantee your anonymity or confidentiality. All data will be transcribed and reported only in aggregate form. No identifying information will be used in reports.

To thank you for your participation, you will be provided pizza and soft drinks.

If you are interested in participating in this research, please contact me and I will provide additional information.

This study has been reviewed by, and received approval through the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Ethics Research Board (BEH#533).

Bulletin content is U of S-related but not endorsed by the university. You may choose which bulletin board categories appear in PAWS and iUsask by clicking the gear icon at the top of the feed in PAWS.

For more information, contact:

Lyle Kaye

Appendix C: Recruitment Poster

Department of *Educational Psychology and Special
Education*
University of Saskatchewan

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR
RESEARCH IN *Gaming Culture*

I am seeking young adult males (ages 18-25) to take part in a research study about the experiences of gaming culture during adolescence.

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to answer a brief demographics questionnaire and participate in a focus group about gaming culture.

Your participation would involve *1 Focus Group* session taking *60-90* minutes.

Focus Group Dates Are: Wednesday March 13th at 4:30 PM OR Friday March 15th at 12 P

In appreciation for your time, you will receive
Pizza and Soft Drinks.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact:

Lyle Kaye

Email: [REDACTED]

This study has been reviewed by, and received approval through the Research Ethics Office, University of Saskatchewan (REB approval ID 533).



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Appendix D: Focus Group Consent Form



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SASKATCHEWAN

Participant Consent Form

You have been invited to participate in a research study entitled:
“GAMERS’ MINDSET: A RETROSPECTIVE STUDY EXAMINING YOUNG ADULTS’
EXPERIENCES OF ONLINE GAMING CYBERBULLYING”

Researcher:

Lyle Kaye, B.A. Honours, M. Ed Candidate

Department of Educational Psychology & Special Education
University of Saskatchewan

Email: [REDACTED]

Supervisor:

Laurie-Ann Hellsten, Ph. D

Department of Educational Psychology & Special
Education

University of Saskatchewan

Email: [REDACTED]

Purpose(s) and Objective(s) of the Research:

Cyberbullying has impacted the academic, social, emotional, and psychological well-being of children, adolescents, and young adults for the last two decades. Much less is known about the experiences of cyberbullying in the world of online gaming. Given that most adolescent and young adult males play games online, understanding how they view and experience the concept of cyberbullying while online gaming is an important one to examine. Therefore, the purpose of the research is to explore young male adults’ (ages 18-25) experiences of cyberbullying while online gaming during adolescence. More specifically, the research is examining how young adults describe their adolescent experiences of online gaming. Another question the research will examine is how young adults interpret and explain the role that friendships played in their previous adolescent experiences of online gaming.

Procedures:

You are invited to participate in a focus group with the researcher and approximately 5-8 other individuals. The session will take approximately 60-90 minutes in length. You will be asked questions related to your understanding of cyberbullying, experiences of cyberbullying, experiences of online gaming, and questions about friendships. The consent form will be provided to you prior to the date of the focus group so you can fully understand the project. On the day of the focus group you will be asked to sign two copies of the consent form. You will also be asked to complete a basic demographics information sheet, asking about age, city/town, level of education and other questions. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer, without any explanation. The focus group will be recorded using a digital audio recording device. All discussion will be transcribed, analyzed, and used to gain a better understanding of cyberbullying through online gaming. Any participant may request that the recording device be turned off for a period of time. Please feel free to ask any questions regarding the procedures and goals of the study at any time.

Potential Risks:

There are no known social, psychological, physical, or economic risks associated with participating in the current research. The current investigation of the phenomenon may cause you

to feel emotional discomfort, particularly when discussing experiences of being cyberbullied. First, the potential of distress will be lessened by allowing you to opt out of the focus group at any point in time without explanation or penalty. Alternatively, you may request to turn off the audio recorder at any point without question. It is important to note that you are not obligated to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable. At the end of the focus group, you will be offered a debriefing form that outlines community resources to access if you feel any distress.

Potential Benefits:

By participating you may provide unique and important insights into the way males view cyberbullying in the realm of online gaming. This insight may be of assistance to you in your understanding of any previous experiences of cyberbullying. The information could lead to new developments in this particular field of research.

Compensation:

As a thank-you for your participation, you will receive pizza and soft drinks.

Confidentiality:

Prior to the start of the focus group, participants will be asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire. It will be kept confidential and stored in a locked filing cabinet of the researcher's supervisor. If participants happen to forget the signed copy additional ones will be provided.

The questionnaire will be confidential but not anonymous. Although no identifying information will be on the questionnaire, pseudonyms will be used in the focus groups and the pseudonym will be linked to each individual's questionnaire. You will also be allowed to choose your pseudonym, if you wish.

Confidentiality will be maintained for each participant by using a pseudonym when audio recordings are transcribed. No personal identifying information will be included in any documents or reports. As researchers, we will protect the confidentiality of the focus group discussions. Any identifying information (e.g., consent form) will be stored separately from the data collected. The information collected will contribute to the researcher's Master's thesis, and may also appear in other conferences or peer-reviewed journals. While direct quotations may be reported in these scholarly reports, no personally identifying information will be included.

The researcher will undertake to safeguard the confidentiality of the discussion, but cannot guarantee that other members of the group will do so. You will be asked to respect the confidentiality of the other members of the group by not disclosing the contents of the focus group discussion outside the group.

Confidentiality will be protected "within the limits of the law". For example, protection of health, life, and safety, may justify infringement of your privacy and confidentiality. If past or possible future illegal activities are disclosed to the researcher and other participants the researcher will have to notify the proper authorities. Furthermore if "clear, serious and imminent risk" of bodily harm or death to an identifiable group or person constitutes a "compelling public interest" that may justify a limited public safety exception to the normal duty of confidentiality. Should an incident of disclosure of any inappropriate and illegal activities occur in the focus

group the researcher will immediately stop the discussion and inform all participants that the disclosure is illegal and will be reported to the police.

Storage of Data:

Data will be stored by the supervisor of the graduate student (Dr. Laurie Hellsten). All physical data (including consent forms) will be stored in a locked filing cabinet drawer of the supervisor in her office. The digital recording device once completed will also be stored in a separate locked filing cabinet drawer in supervisor's office at the University of Saskatchewan. All transcripts and information about the participants will be stored for 5 years. Following the 5 years, all paper documents will be shredded beyond recovery and all electronic copies or information about the participants (i.e., emails) will be deleted beyond recovery from the password protected computer of the researcher and his supervisor. Digital audio recordings will be stored in password protected computer files. In addition to the original electronic data which will be stored on a password encrypted computer of the supervisor, electronic data will also be stored on a secure cabinet on Paws.

Right to Withdraw:

Your right to withdraw is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw for any reason without explanation or penalty of any sort. Whether you choose to participate or not will have no effect on your grade if you are a student at the University of Saskatchewan. If you choose to withdraw during the focus group your demographic questionnaire will be deleted. However, discussion data that has been collected as part of the focus group cannot be withdrawn. It is possible that some form of research dissemination will have already occurred and it will not be possible to withdraw your data. Finally, if you wish to withdraw at any point, you will still be entitled to participate in the compensation of pizza and soft drinks, following the focus group.

Follow up:

Upon the completion of the study, a summary of the research results can be made available to you. Please e-mail the graduate student researcher (Lyle Kaye) or the supervisor (Dr. Laurie-Ann Hellsten). Contact information is located on page one of this document.

Questions or Concerns:

If you have any questions or concerns, you are invited to contact the graduate research student (Lyle Kaye or the supervisor (Laurie-Ann Hellsten). Contact information is located at the top of page one of this document. This project has been approved by the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board (REB #: Beh-533, January 22, 2019). Any questions regarding your participation may also be addressed to the Research Ethics Office at ethics.office@usask.ca or (306) 966-2975. Out of town participants may call toll free to (888) 966-2975.

Signed Consent:

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood the description provided.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

A copy of this consent will be e-mailed to you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix E: Individual Interview Consent Form



Participant Consent Form

**You have been invited to participate in a research study entitled:
“GAMERS’ MINDSET: A RETROSPECTIVE STUDY EXAMINING YOUNG ADULTS’
EXPERIENCES OF ONLINE GAMING CYBERBULLYING”**

Researcher:

Lyle Kaye, B.A. Honours, M. Ed Candidate

Department of Educational Psychology & Special Education
University of Saskatchewan

Email: [REDACTED]

Supervisor:

Laurie-Ann Hellsten, Ph. D

Department of Educational Psychology & Special
Education

University of Saskatchewan

Email: [REDACTED]

Purpose(s) and Objective(s) of

the Research:

Cyberbullying has impacted the academic, social, emotional, and psychological well-being of children, adolescents, and young adults for the last two decades. Much less is known about the experiences of cyberbullying in the world of online gaming. Given that most adolescent and young adult males play games online, understanding how they view and experience the concept of cyberbullying while online gaming is an important one to examine. Therefore, the purpose of the research is to explore young male adults’ (ages 18-25) experiences of cyberbullying while online gaming during adolescence. More specifically, the research is examining how young adults describe their adolescent experiences of online gaming. Another question the research will examine is how young adults interpret and explain the role that friendships played in their previous adolescent experiences of online gaming.

Procedures:

You are invited to participate in an individual interview. The session will take approximately 60-90 minutes in length. You will be asked questions related to your understanding of cyberbullying, experiences of cyberbullying, experiences of online gaming, and questions about friendships. On the day of the interview you will be asked to sign two copies of the consent form, one for your records and one for the researcher. You will also be asked to complete a basic demographics information sheet, asking about age, city/town, level of education and other questions. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer, without any explanation. The interview will be recorded using a digital audio recording device. The interview will be transcribed and analyzed to gain a better understanding of cyberbullying through online gaming. You may request that the recording device be turned off for a period of time. Please feel free to ask any questions regarding the procedures and goals of the study at any time.

Potential Risks:

There are no known social, psychological, physical, or economic risks associated with participating in the current research. The current investigation of the phenomenon may cause you to feel emotional discomfort, particularly when discussing experiences of being cyberbullied. First, the potential of distress will be lessened by allowing you to opt out of the interview at any point in time without explanation or penalty. Alternatively, you may request to turn off the audio recorder at any point without question. It is important to note that you are not obligated to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable. At the end of the interview, you will be offered a debriefing form that outlines community resources to access if you feel any distress.

Potential Benefits:

By participating you may provide unique and important insights into the way males view cyberbullying in the realm of online gaming. This insight may be of assistance to you in your understanding of any previous experiences of cyberbullying. The information could lead to new developments in this particular field of research.

Compensation:

As a thank-you for your participation, you will receive pizza and soft drinks.

Confidentiality:

Prior to the start of the interview, you will be asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire. It will be kept confidential and stored in a locked filing cabinet of the researcher's supervisor. If you happen to forget the signed copy additional ones will be provided.

Confidentiality will be maintained for each participant by using a pseudonym when audio recordings are transcribed. No personal identifying information will be included in any documents or reports. As researchers, we will protect the confidentiality of the interview. Any identifying information (e.g., consent form) will be stored separately from the data collected. The information collected will contribute to the researcher's Master's thesis, and may also appear in other conferences or peer-reviewed journals. While direct quotations may be reported in these scholarly reports, no personally identifying information will be included.

Confidentiality will be protected "within the limits of the law". For example, protection of health, life, and safety, may justify infringement of your privacy and confidentiality. If past or possible future illegal activities are disclosed to the researcher, the researcher will have to notify the proper authorities. Furthermore if "clear, serious and imminent risk" of bodily harm or death to an identifiable group or person constitutes a "compelling public interest" that may justify a limited public safety exception to the normal duty of confidentiality. Should an incident of disclosure of any inappropriate and illegal activities occur in the interview the researcher will immediately stop the discussion and inform you that the disclosure is illegal and will be reported to the police.

Storage of Data:

Data will be stored by the supervisor of the graduate student (Dr. Laurie Hellsten). All physical data (including consent forms) will be stored in a locked filing cabinet drawer of the supervisor in her office. The digital recording device once completed will also be stored in a separate locked filing cabinet drawer in supervisor's office at the University of Saskatchewan. All transcripts and

information about the participants will be stored for 5 years. Following the 5 years, all paper documents will be shredded beyond recovery and all electronic copies or information about the participants (i.e., emails) will be deleted beyond recovery from the password protected computer of the researcher and his supervisor. Digital audio recordings will be stored in password protected computer files. In addition to the original electronic data which will be stored on a password encrypted computer of the supervisor, electronic data will also be stored on a secure cabinet on Paws.

Right to Withdraw:

Your right to withdraw is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw for any reason without explanation or penalty of any sort. Whether you choose to participate or not will have no effect on your grade if you are a student at the University of Saskatchewan. If you choose to withdraw during the interview your demographic questionnaire will be deleted. It is possible that some form of research dissemination will have already occurred and it will not be possible to withdraw your data. Finally, if you wish to withdraw at any point, you will still be entitled to participate in the compensation of pizza and soft drinks, following the interview.

Follow up:

Upon the completion of the study, a summary of the research results can be made available to you. Please e-mail the graduate student researcher (Lyle Kaye) or the supervisor (Dr. Laurie-Ann Hellsten). Contact information is located on page one of this document.

Questions or Concerns:

If you have any questions or concerns, you are invited to contact the graduate research student (Lyle Kaye or the supervisor (Laurie-Ann Hellsten). Contact information is located at the top of page one of this document. This project has been approved by the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board (REB #: Beh-533, January 22, 2019). Any questions regarding your participation may also be addressed to the Research Ethics Office at ethics.office@usask.ca or (306) 966-2975. Out of town participants may call toll free to (888) 966-2975.

Signed Consent:

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood the description provided.

-

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

_____	_____	_____
<i>Name of Participant</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>
_____	_____	
<i>Researcher's Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>	

A copy of this consent will be e-mailed to you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix F: Demographics Questionnaire



Note to participant: Please do not write your name on this form. You may skip any questions you do not feel comfortable with. Please let the researcher know if you have any questions, concerns, or need clarification for any of the below items. Feel free to include any additional information you think the researcher may find useful.

1. **What is your current age?** _____

2. **Please identify your city/town and province/territory.**

City/town: _____ Province/territory: _____

3. **Please indicate your highest achieved level of formal education:**

- Some high school, no diploma
- High school graduate, diploma, or equivalent (e.g., GED)
- Some college credit, no degree
- Trade/technical training
- Associate degree completed
- Bachelor's degree completed
- Master's degree completed
- Professional degree completed
- Doctorate degree completed

4. **What is your current area of study/occupation?** _____

5. **Throughout your teenage years, how often on average, did you play online games in a week?**

- 1 day a week
- 2 days a week
- 3 days a week
- 4 or more days a week

6. Throughout your teenage years how many hours a day did you play online games?

- Less than 1 hour a day
- 1-2 hours per day
- 2-4 hours per day
- 4 or more hours per day

7. Currently how often do you play online games in a week?

- 1 day a week
- 2 days a week
- 3 days a week
- 4 or more days a week

8. Currently how many hours a day do you play online games?

- Less than 1 hour a day
- 1-2 hours per day
- 2-4 hours per day
- 4 or more hours per day

9. Throughout your teenage years, whom did you primarily play online games with?

- Friends
- Strangers
- A Combination of both

10. What is the main format you currently play online games

- Microsoft Xbox 360/Xbox 1
- Sony Playstation 3/4
- Nintendo Wii/WiiU/ Switch
- PC/Laptop
- Handheld Gaming Devices
- Other handheld devices such as smartphones and tablets

11. What genre of games do you currently enjoy playing online the most (Check all that apply)?

- Action
- Adventure
- Combat
- Educational
- Fighting (one on one i.e., Street Fighter)
- First Person Shooters (FPS)
- Massive Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs)
- Puzzle
- Racing
- Real-Time Strategy (RTS)
- Role Playing Games (RPGs)
- Sports
- Stealth Shooters
- Strategy Games
- Other: _____

Appendix G: Focus Group/Interview Guide

- 1) What are your favourite types of genres and games to play online? [RQ 1 &3]
 - a. Could you tell me why you like playing them?
 - b. Did you play these as a younger boy? If so, what was that like? If not, what did you play then, and what was that like?
- 2) Could you tell me some of your experiences of online gaming as a younger person – as a teenager?
 - a. Can you talk about why you played online games?
 - b. Can you talk about playing with others – what was that like? Who did you play with?
 - c. Can you tell me about making friends and being friends online with other gamers?
- 3) What role do friendships play while online gaming?
 - a. How did you and your gaming friends interact while playing online?
 - b. Can you talk about the way you talked to and about each other?
 - c. Can you talk about the difference playing online with old friends, new friends or strangers?
 - d. Did the kind of game or genre change the way boys interacted while gaming?
- 4) Based on what we've talked about so far, how would you describe normal online gaming culture?
- 5) Some people think that boys are sometimes raised to be tough and macho, and that they often joke around with each other in ways that might raise eyebrows – for example calling each other names. Others wonder if some of the negative interactions are not just boys being boys, but are bullying or cyberbullying. So, I'm going to give you a scenario and ask you to tell me your thoughts about what is going on in these boys' relationships.

Scenario: Ryan and Jarod are two friends in grade 11 who enjoy playing Call of Duty: World War 2 nearly every day after school with each other and other people on campaign missions. During the game Jarod is playing poorly and Ryan comments on it and tells Jarod that he is a loser and he sucks at the game and should quit so he does not bring the other team members down.

If you were one of the other participants in the game, and you did not know Ryan and Jarod what do think is going on in this scenario? What if you knew they were friends would that change? What if it were a different game such as Minecraft?

- a) Is the way Ryan is talking to Jarod part of the normal gaming culture?
- b) Some people call this trash-talking. Is trash-talking normal in gaming?
- d) Do you think this is cyberbullying?
- 6) What Role does Trash-talking play in the online gaming community?
 - a) What role does competition play in the online gaming community?
- 7) Based on what we've talked about so far, how would you define cyberbullying while online gaming?
- 8) Can you talk about your own experiences of cyberbullying while gaming online? Or if you have been witnessed or a bystander to cyberbullying through online gaming
 - a. Can you talk about what you did about it? – did you tell a parent or teacher or friend and what was that like?
 - b. What do you think are some of the barriers that keep kids from reporting their negative experiences?
 - c. What do you think now, in retrospect, what would have helped you and others?
 - d) Does cyberbullying occur frequently through online gaming?

Appendix H: Debrief Form



Debriefing

Form

Thank you for your participation in the study entitled:
“THE GAMERS’ MINDSET: A RETROSPECTIVE STUDY EXAMINING YOUNG ADULTS’
EXPERIENCES OF ONLINE GAMING CYBERBULLYING”

Researcher:

Lyle Kaye, B.A. Honours, M. Ed Candidate

Department of Educational Psychology & Special
Education

University of Saskatchewan

Email: [REDACTED]

Supervisor:

Laurie-ann Hellsten, Ph. D

Department of Educational Psychology & Special
Education

University of Saskatchewan

Email: [REDACTED]

Thank you for your participation in this research study. Your perspectives and experiences are invaluable to the study of gaming culture amongst young adult males as they, reflect on their gaming experiences during adolescence. Over the last couple of decades, a plethora of research has examined various components of cyberbullying. One area of cyberbullying research that has received minimal attention is youth’s experiences of cyberbullying while gaming online. Within Canada, online gaming occurs most frequently amongst adolescent males. Traditionally most research on cyberbullying uses surveys and questionnaires to obtain results. Only a handful of studies have tried to explore the experiences of cyber-bullied victims through interviews or focus groups.

Being that cyberbullying can be extremely detrimental to adolescent development, it is vital that more research be conducted on how adolescents feel and experience cyberbullying. During this focus group you were asked questions regarding the types of online games you engaged in, the reasons for playing online games, the role of friendships while gaming online, as well as questions regarding gaming culture and cyberbullying. Your participation is invaluable.

By better understanding how young adults experience adolescent cyberbullying through their most common way of communicating electronically (i.e., videogames) we, as practitioners, educators, and psychologists can develop better ways of dealing with cyberbullying.

Once again, thank you for your participation in this study (Beh-REB # 533, January 22, 2019). If you have any questions or concerns about your participation, you may contact either of the researchers listed at the top of this page.

If you are interested in the topic of cyberbullying and gaming, the following article may be of interest to you:

McInroy, L.B., & Mishna, F. (2017). Cyberbullying on online gaming platforms for children and youth. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 34, 597-607. doi:10.1007/s10560-017-0498-0.

If anything discussed in the interview was troubling for you, or you are experiencing distress, please contact a local mental health agency. Alternatively, please review the list of support agencies below that may be helpful for you:

1. **Canada Suicide Prevention Service (CSPS)** Phone toll free: 1-833-456-4566. Text: 45645. Chat: crisisservicescanada.ca
2. **Saskatoon Mental Health**: 306-655-7777, or www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca/locations_services/services/mhas.
3. **University of Saskatchewan Student Wellness Center (University of Saskatchewan Students)**: 306-955-5768 or <https://students.usask.ca/health/centres/wellness-centre.php#Urgentassistance>.
4. **Saskatchewan Polytechnic Health and Wellness (Saskatchewan Polytechnic Students)**: www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca/locations_services/Services/mhas.
5. **First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness 24/7 Help Line** Phone: 1-855-242-3310

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