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Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender & Questioning

Young People on the Internet:

Insights from European Focus Groups

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Doctorate in Clinical Psychology

The University of Edinburgh

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Title of Work: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender & Questioning (LGBTQ) Young People on the Internet: Insights from European Focus Groups

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Contents

1. Thesis Abstract

Introduction: This thesis investigates the experiences of young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and who are questioning their sexuality (LGBTQ) on the Internet. Specifically, the project explores how LGBTQ young people use the Internet, how they communicate online, the impact that the Internet has on their life and how they stay safe online. Despite the Internet being an ever-growing aspect of people's lives and the potential opportunities that it presents for marginalised groups such as LGBTQ young people, there have been a relatively small number of qualitative studies in the area.

Methodology: As there has been limited research regarding LGBTQ young people's use of the Internet, a systematic review of qualitative studies exploring the experiences and views of cyberbullying by children and adolescents in the general population was conducted using Framework Synthesis. Subsequently, an empirical study was completed which involved conducting a secondary analysis, using Framework Analysis methodology, of data collected from focus groups with LGBTQ young people regarding their Internet use. In total, five focus groups were held with forty-one LGBTQ young people recruited across four European countries.

Results: A total of eighteen studies were included in the qualitative synthesis exploring children and adolescents' cyberbullying experiences. Although there was some variation in the quality of the studies, there was clear support

for four main themes: Online vs. Traditional Bullying Environment, Risk Factors, Victim's Experience and Preventative Measures. These themes highlighted both the potential causative factors of cyberbullying as well as how the victim experiences different aspects of the incident such as their initial understanding of the event to the long-term impact of cyberbullying. A number of preventative measures were also suggested, including the need for adults to increase their understanding of technology and cyberbullying in order to enable them to be a viable source of help.

Within the empirical study, four main themes emerged from the data: Digital World as Part of Daily Life, In Control of Their Online World, Seeking Connection and Navigating Risk. The latter three main themes also consisted of a number of subthemes. The results indicate that participants have embraced the Internet into their everyday lives and that the LGBTQ population reaps specific benefits as the Internet allows them to overcome or compensate for barriers faced within their offline lives. Participants also reported the need to navigate many risks online, however interestingly they appeared confident in doing so and discussed the variety of ways in which they achieve this.

Discussion: The results of the qualitative synthesis provided tentative support for two different theoretical models of cyberbullying, indicating that both an individual process model and an ecological system model are mutually useful ways of understanding this phenomenon. Clinical implications

spanned both individual and systemic measures that could be taken to reduce the likelihood of cyberbullying occurring. However, it is also clear that further research, in particular qualitative research, is required to continue to develop our understanding of this topic as a whole.

The findings from the empirical project suggest that LGBTQ young people must balance the opportunities provided by the Internet whilst also managing the risks that it poses. The importance of retaining the empowerment for young people on the Internet was clear, especially for young LGBTQ people who may use the Internet as an alternative way of meeting their needs and engaging in developmental tasks such as sexual identity development. However, there is also a need to ensure that these young people are safe online and therefore interventions such as parental education and the development of age appropriate resources are required to promote both empowerment and safety for this population.

2. The Experience of Cyberbullying by Children and Adolescents: A Qualitative Synthesis

Written in accordance with author guidelines for Computers in Human Behavior (Appendix A)

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Abstract

In recent years, Internet use by children and adolescents has grown at a rapid rate. Although there are a number of benefits to the Internet, there are also risks such as cyberbullying. This review aimed to synthesise qualitative research conducted to date exploring the experiences, attitudes and views of children and adolescents on cyberbullying. A total of eighteen studies met the inclusion criteria for this review. The synthesis found four main themes within the literature: Online vs. Traditional Bullying Environment, Risk Factors, Victim's Experience and Preventative Measures. The results provided tentative support for two different theoretical models of cyberbullying, indicating that both an individual process model and an ecological system model are mutually useful ways of understanding this phenomenon. Clinical implications include the need for adults to increase their understanding of technology and cyberbullying in order to enable them to be a viable source of help to children and adolescents. It is also clear that further research, in particular qualitative research, is required to continue to develop our understanding of this topic as a whole.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, children, adolescent, qualitative, synthesis

Highlights

- There are fundamental differences between the experience of traditional and cyberbullying.

- Risk factors occur at multiple levels within a person's ecological system.

- A victim's experience consists of initial appraisal, coping strategies and impact.

- Preventative measures are needed to target cyberbullying perpetrators.

- Further, in-depth, qualitative research is required.

2.1 Introduction

Over the last decade, there has been a sharp increase in the number of children and adolescents using the Internet, with many viewing it as an integral part of everyday life (Ólafsson, Livingstone, & Haddon, 2014). Studies have shown that young people are spending an increasing amount of time online, with 92% of 13-17 year olds in America reporting to go online daily (Lenhart & Page, 2015). Similarly, Livingstone, Haddon, Vincent, Mascheroni and Ólafsson (2014) reported that 96% of teenagers aged 15-16 years in the UK use the Internet daily within their own bedroom. This increase in use may be partly due to greater accessibility, from the introduction of mobile online devices such as smart phones and tablets (Hasebrink, 2014; Lenhart & Page, 2015). Young people are also now using the Internet for a wider range of activities including social networking, searching for information, gaming and entertainment (Hasebrink, 2014; Ólafsson et al., 2014).

The Internet provides many opportunities and benefits for children and adolescents including greater social connection and enhanced learning possibilities (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011). However, children and adolescents may also be exposed to a wide range of risks online, including exposure to unwanted content such as pornography or violent material, inappropriate contact from others online, bullying or their online account being hacked (Livingstone, Kirwil, Ponte, & Staksrud, 2013).

2.1.1 Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying has received a great deal of attention both in the research literature and the media. Researchers have used a number of different definitions of cyberbullying and may also refer to it as online aggression, cyber harassment or cyber victimisation (Aboujaoude, Savage, Starcevic, & Salame, 2015). Tokunaga (2010) integrated a number of these definitions and proposed that cyberbullying is "*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*" (Tokunaga, 2010, pp. 278). However, as discussed by Aboujaoude et al. (2015), the criterion for repetition within the cyberbullying definition requires further clarification as a single act may be viewed numerous times by others or shared further by other cyberbullies, thus repeating the cyberbullying event without the occurrence of another discrete incident.

Owing to the lack of consensus regarding a cyberbullying definition, there is disparity within the literature regarding the prevalence of this phenomenon (Berne, Frisén, & Kling, 2014; Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014). Prevalence estimates are also affected by differing measurement strategies, studying only certain cyberbullying behaviours, focusing on particular devices/media and imposing constraints such as time frames (Doane, Pearson, & Kelley, 2014; Kowalski et al., 2014). This may help to

explain the finding that cyberbullying prevalence rates ranged from 2-95% across 131 studies included in a review conducted by Kowalski et al. (2014).

2.1.2 Theories of Cyberbullying

Key review papers have noted that, to date, cyberbullying research lacks a clear theoretical foundation (Kowalski et al., 2014; Tokunaga, 2010). However, some researchers have investigated the applicability of theories previously proposed within traditional bullying or criminology literature. Routine Activities Theory, developed by Cohen & Felson (1979), has been suggested as a viable way of understanding cyberbullying (Ang, 2015; Navarro & Jasinski, 2012). This theory proposes that three factors (motivated offenders, a suitable target and inadequate guardianship) must be present for a crime to occur. Both Navarro & Jasinski (2012) and Ang (2015) suggest that known risk factors for cyberbullying such as a victim's level of Internet use, victim characteristics and level of parental monitoring, can be applied successfully to this theory. However, Routine Activities Theory does not address many other important factors such as the interpersonal nature of a cyberbullying event or differential victim outcomes.

Other researchers have suggested that Social Ecological Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) may be a useful way of conceptualising cyberbullying (Baldry, Farrington, & Sorrentino, 2015; Cross et al., 2015). It proposes that ecological, cognitive and psychosocial risk factors are present within the individual and the context/system in which they live and that these risk

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factors interact with each other to increase the likelihood of an event or behaviour occurring. In the case of cyberbullying perpetration, Cross et al. (2015) propose that individual level influences (e.g. demographic factors and attitudes) interact with family, peer, online and community level influences (e.g. parental monitoring, peer norms, frequent use of the Internet and awareness of cyberbullying regulatory actions) to increase the likelihood that a person will engage in cyberbullying behaviour. Baldry et al. (2015) showed that Social Ecological Theory could also be applied to cybervictimisation.

A key advantage of this theory is that it recognises the interpersonal, systemic and dynamic nature of cyberbullying and that the event is unlikely to have occurred as a direct outcome of individual behaviours or a single risk factor (Cross et al., 2015). The theory also allows the identification of protective factors at each level of the system that may already be present or can be provided via interventions (Baldry et al., 2015; Cross et al., 2015). However, Cross et al. (2015) highlight that, unlike traditional ecological frameworks such as those proposed by Baldry et al. (2015), the model needs to be adapted to include the online environment as an independent level of influence within the ecological framework due to evidence suggesting that factors specific to the online environment influence cyberbullying behaviour and the impact on the victim.

A criticism of both Routine Activity Theory and Social Ecological Theory is the focus on risk of cyberbullying rather than providing a model that depicts

the process of the whole event. Kowalski et al. (2014) suggested that the General Aggression Model would be a useful way of understanding cyberbullying. In this model, the presence of individual and situational risk factors lead to a cyberbullying event which is then appraised via cognitive, affective and arousal routes, ultimately leading to a decision on how to react e.g. the victim deactivating their account. The model also acknowledges that cyberbullying has a long-term impact however the process between deciding how to react to the cyberbullying event, reacting in this way and the subsequent long-term outcomes is not clear. Kowalski et al. (2014) discuss the merits of this model including it providing a testable hypothesis for future cyberbullying research and the fact that it integrates both individual factors at a cognitive level (rather than simply personal characteristics) and the main aspects of other system related factors. It also appears that this model complements other more simplistic models such as the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping as discussed by Raskauskas & Huynh (2015) and the Cyclic Process Model proposed by Den Hamer, Konijn, & Keijer (2014).

2.1.3 Impact of Cyberbullying

A clear finding within the literature is the negative impact of cyberbullying. The severity of these negative outcomes ranges from minor to severe depending on the frequency, length and severity of the cyberbullying experience (Cassidy, Faucher, & Jackson, 2013; Foody, Samara, & Carlbring, 2015; Tokunaga, 2010). Additional factors to be considered include the anonymity of the perpetrator, the potential wider audience of the

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cyberbullying event and the fact that it can occur anywhere at any time, all of which can increase the perceived severity of the event and cause greater levels of distress (Bottino, Bottino, Regina, Correia, & Ribeiro, 2015; Cassidy et al., 2013).

Psychological difficulties are the most commonly reported negative impact on victims and include depression, suicidal ideation, anxiety, low self esteem, loneliness, emotional distress and anger (Bottino et al., 2015; Cassidy et al., 2013; Foody et al., 2015; Kowalski et al., 2014; Tokunaga 2010). Somatic symptoms such as sleep problems, maladaptive behaviours such as drug and alcohol use, conduct problems and social problems such as relationship disruption, have also been reported by cybervictims (Cassidy et al., 2013; Foody et al., 2015, Kowalski et al., 2014). Victims also report lower academic achievement (perhaps due to reduced concentration), increased school absences and not feeling safe in school, which may lead to behaviours such as carrying weapons (Cassidy et al., 2013; Foody et al., 2015; Tokunaga, 2010). A criticism of the literature is that many of the findings reported come from cross sectional data. Therefore, it is not possible to specify if these difficulties are risk factors for experiencing cyberbullying, if the difficulties were caused by cyberbullying or a combination of both (Aboujaoude et al., 2015; Kiriakidis & Kavoura, 2010).

Perpetrators of cyberbullying may also experience similar psychological, behavioural and social difficulties (Aboujaoude et al., 2015; Cassidy et al.,

2013; Kowalski et al., 2014). Furthermore, studies have found that cyberbullying is highly related to cybervictimisation, indicating that cyberbullies are often victims of cyberbullying themselves who may have been provoked to go on to cyberbully others (Kowalski et al., 2014). Foody et al. (2015) conducted a review of the literature and reported that those who are both a cyberbully and victim of cyberbullying experience the worst psychological impact. However, only one of the three studies referenced regarding this conclusion directly measured psychological impact in this population and therefore further research to investigate this finding is required.

2.1.4 Aim

To date, systematic reviews regarding cyberbullying have focused almost exclusively on quantitative research and have explored the risk factors and outcomes of being a victim or perpetrator of cyberbullying (Aboujaoude et al., 2015; Ang, 2015; Bottino et al., 2015; Cassidy et al., 2013; Foody et al., 2015; Kowalski et al., 2014; Tokunaga, 2010). However, qualitative research provides an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon based on people's experiences (Ring, Ritchie, Mandava, & Jepson, 2010). Therefore, the aim of the current systematic review was to synthesise qualitative research studies investigating child and adolescent experiences, views and attitudes of cyberbullying. It was hoped that this work would help to develop a deeper understanding of cyberbullying from the perspectives of children and adolescents and allow an evaluation of cyberbullying theories.

In turn, these findings could help to inform future research and provide

guidance on possible interventions.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 'Best fit' Framework Synthesis

In order to meet the aim of this review, a synthesis of qualitative research was conducted. There are various methods of qualitative synthesis including meta-ethnography, grounded theory, thematic synthesis and framework synthesis, each with their own merits and confounds (Barnett-Page & Thomas, 2009). Framework synthesis, using the 'best fit' methodology described by Carroll, Booth, Leaviss, & Rick (2013), is a transparent, systematic way of conducting a qualitative synthesis. Initially an a-priori framework, based upon relevant theories and models, is created. Subsequently, primary research articles are coded against this framework. This process ultimately allows the evaluation of existing theories and models using qualitative evidence and, if necessary, a more comprehensive model based on the synthesis findings can be created (Carroll et al., 2013).

The use of 'best fit' framework synthesis was deemed to be the most appropriate methodology for this review as the topic of cyberbullying has been conceptualised from differing theoretical perspectives resulting in a range of proposed models. These existing theories and models, which have been developed from primarily quantitative data, were used to create an a-priori framework that could subsequently be evaluated using qualitative primary research articles. Therefore this methodology could be used to identify if the theories and models conceptualise cyberbullying in a manner

that reflects the experiences, views and attitudes of those who have been involved either as a victim, perpetrator or bystander.

2.2.2 A-Priori Framework

2.2.2.1 Search Strategy

In order to develop the a-priori framework, a systematic search was conducted to identify articles that explore or create frameworks, models or theories regarding cyberbullying. This search was conducted in January 2016 over three key databases: Medline, Embase and PsycINFO using the OVID platform. A combination of thesaurus and free text search terms were used to identify relevant articles as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: A-Priori Framework Creation Search Terms

	←AND→		
	Term 1	**Term 2**	**Term 3**
↑OR↓	Cyberbullying	Bullying	Model
	Internet	Aggression	Theory
	Online		Framework
	Social Media		Systematic Review
	Social Networking		Meta-analysis

2.2.2.2 Inclusion/ Exclusion Criteria

Articles were included in the a-priori framework if the: aim of the article was to explore or create a framework, model or theory regarding cyberbullying (articles based upon primary research data were excluded); the article was published in a peer-reviewed journal (no restriction on date published) and

available in English. Figure 1 illustrates the inclusion/exclusion process for identifying the final articles included in the a-priori framework.

Figure 1: Process of Identifying Framework Articles

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│     Initial database searches       │
│             (n=593)                 │
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┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│     Duplicates removed & titles     │
│        screened for relevance       │
│             (n=133)                 │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
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┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│     Abstracts screened & checked    │
│     against inclusion/exclusion     │
│              criteria               │
│              (n=10)                 │
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┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│     Full articles read & checked    │
│     against inclusion/exclusion     │
│              criteria               │
│                                     │
│    Four articles excluded as did    │
│    not propose model/theory/        │
│    framework of cyberbullying       │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
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┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│     Final articles included in      │
│              framework              │
│              (n=6)                  │
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2.2.2.3 Framework Creation

Following the identification of appropriate articles, the key themes of each model/theory/ framework were identified and were compiled to create an a-priori framework. The final framework and definitions of each theme is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: A-Priori Framework including Theme Definitions

Framework Theme	Definition
Online Behaviour and Ability	Includes the amount of time spent online, types of sites visited, level of disclosure of personal information and level of technological skill.
Online Environment vs. Traditional Bullying Environment	Includes anonymity, 24/7 access, lack of visual feedback and social cues following actions.
Individual Factors	Factors that increase the likelihood of cyberbullying victimisation and perpetration. Includes static factors (e.g. age, previous behaviour) and changeable factors (e.g. mental health, self-esteem, attitude to aggression).
Interpersonal Factors	The influence that relationships with, and attitudes of, parents and peers can have on cyberbullying victimisation and perpetration.
School Environment	Factors such as teacher support, school policy on bullying and school climate.
Making Sense of the Cyberbullying Event	Initial thoughts and feelings and subsequent appraisal and decision-making about how to react to the cyberbullying event.
Reacting to & Coping with Cyberbullying	Includes initial behavioural response based on the appraisal of the situation and coping strategies available to the individual.
Long Term Impact	Includes mental health, physical health, social functioning & behavioural problems.

2.2.3 Primary Research Articles

2.2.3.1 Search Strategy

As suggested by Carroll et al. (2013), parallel database searches were carried out during December 2015 and January 2016 to identify primary research articles. A total of nine databases were searched across the Ovid platform (Medline, Embase and PsycINFO databases), EBSCO host platform (Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health, Psychology & Behavioural Science databases), ProQuest platform (Education Resources Information Centre, Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts, Social Services Abstracts) and the Web of Science database. A combination of thesaurus and free text search terms were used to identify relevant articles as shown in Table 3.

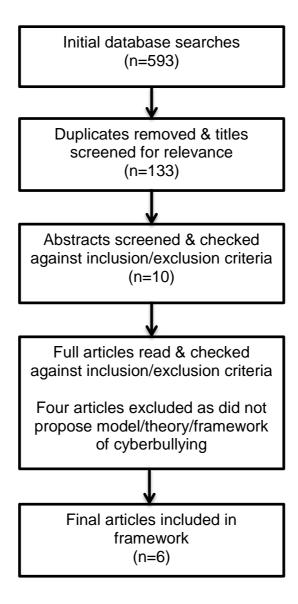**Table 3: Primary Research Articles Search Terms**

	←AND→			
	Term 1	**Term 2**	**Term 3**	**Term 4**
OR↑↓	Cyberbullying	Internet	Child*	Qualitative
	Bullying	Electronic	Adolescen*	Focus Group
	Aggression	Digital	Teenage*	Interview
	Victim	Online	Youth	Voice
		Virtual	Young Person	Experience
		Phone	Young People	Perception
		Text	Student	Perspective
		Email		Attitude
		SMS		Thematic Analysis
		Social networking site		Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
		Social Media		Grounded Theory

Additional searches of the reference lists of the final included primary research articles were carried out. The Google Scholar search engine was also used to find any relevant articles that had cited the originally identified articles.

2.2.3.2 Inclusion/ Exclusion Criteria

Primary research articles were included in the qualitative synthesis if: the aim of the study was to investigate the experiences, perceptions or views of cyberbullying by children and adolescents; participants were aged 19 years or younger (in line with the World Health Organisation's definition of a child and adolescent); the study used qualitative design or mixed methods design in which the qualitative data could clearly be distinguished from the quantitative data; article was published in a peer reviewed journal (no restriction on date published) and was available in English. Review, discussion, theoretical papers and book chapters were excluded.

Figure 2 illustrates the inclusion/exclusion process for identifying primary research articles to be included in the qualitative synthesis.

Figure 2: Process of Identifying Primary Research Articles


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┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Initial database searches│
│        (n=4636)          │
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┌─────────────────────────┐
│   Duplicates removed &    │
│    titles screened for    │
│        relevance          │
│        (n=281)            │
└─────────────────────────┘
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┌─────────────────────────┐
│   Abstracts screened      │
│   checked against         │
│ inclusion/exclusion       │
│   criteria (n=61)         │
└─────────────────────────┘
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            ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐       ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
│  Full articles read &     │──────▶│ Reasons for article exclusion:   │
│   checked against         │       │                                  │
│ inclusion/exclusion       │       │ • Aim of study not appropriate=5 │
│   criteria                │       │ • Out-with or unspecified age    │
└─────────────────────────┘       │   range=9                        │
            │                      │ • Quantitative methodology=12    │
            │                      │ • Unable to separate qualitative │
            │                      │   from quantitative data =7      │
            │                      │ • Not published in a peer        │
            │                      │   reviewed journal=5             │
            │                      │ • Full article not published in  │
            │                      │   English=3                      │
            │                      │ • Review article= 3              │
            │                      │ • Supplemental journal article   │
            │                      │   (too little detail)=1          │
            │                      └──────────────────────────────────┘
            │                      ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
            │◀─────────────────────│ Papers included from other       │
            │                      │ sources:                         │
            │                      │                                  │
            │                      │ • Reference search of articles =1│
            │                      │ • Cited by search of articles = 1│
            ▼                      └──────────────────────────────────┘
┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Final articles included in│
│  qualitative synthesis    │
│        (n=18)             │
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2.2.3.3 Data Extraction & Quality Appraisal

The key characteristics and findings of each study were extracted, as shown in Table 4. Subsequently, each article was judged against pre-determined quality areas (see Appendix B). The quality areas were developed based upon research conducted by Hannes, Lockwood, & Pearson (2010) in which the validity of three qualitative critical appraisal tools was compared. By combining elements from the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (2006) and the Evaluation Tool for Qualitative Studies (Long, Godfrey, Randall, Brettle, & Grant, 2002), it was possible to create a comprehensive way of appraising the key concepts identified by Hannes et al. (2010) as important areas of quality in qualitative research. This included an appropriate research design to meet the aims of the study, a clear data collection and analysis process and addressing the impact that the investigator may have on the research. The results of this quality appraisal are described in a narrative format, rather than numerical values indicative of quality being prescribed. This approach was deemed most appropriate given the key issues in appraising quality in qualitative studies such as the diverse data collection and methodological approaches used by researchers (Dixon-Woods, Shaw, Agarwal, & Smith, 2004).

In order to increase the reliability of quality appraisal, 50% (n= 9) of the studies were independently rated by a second researcher. There was complete agreement on methodological quality within five of the nine papers

co-reviewed. Across the remaining four papers there were seven items (out of a total of 40) in which authors discussed and resolved their differing views.

2.2.3.4 Data Synthesis

Following the aforementioned steps, the data was synthesised across studies. This involved coding the findings from each primary research article against the a-priori framework and using thematic analysis to incorporate any evidence that did not fit within original framework.

Table 4: Summary of Studies
CB= Cyberbullying

Study	Aims	Participants	Study design	Analysis	Main Themes
Agatston, Kowalski, & Limber (2007)	To gain an understanding of CB & explore prevention methods.	150 students, 12-17 years from two middle & two high schools in America.	Focus Groups (students divided by gender)	Not documented	• Females view CB as more problematic than males. • Majority of CB incidents occur outside school. • Perception that school personnel cannot help. • Fear that parents will remove online privileges. • Strategies to stop CB include blocking & ignoring.
Baas, de Jong, & Drossaert (2013)	Explore perceptions & experiences of CB.	28 children (15 boys, 13 girls), 11-12 years from four elementary schools.	Six weekly meetings of approx.1 hour in each school. Participants prepared assignments for each topic.	Grounded theory	• CB common & has many different forms. • Impact includes fear, sadness, reduced self-confidence & loss of trust in friends. • Repetition & harmful intentions are key (but ambiguous) features of CB. • Bullies motivated by an internal drive, negative experiences with or characteristics of the victim. • Help seeking hindered by feelings of shame and fear of consequences.

Berne et al. (2014)	Explore experiences of appearance-related CB.	27 children (14 boys, 13 girls), 15 years from a private and public school in Sweden.	Four focus groups. Vignette used to introduce topic then general follow up questions asked.	Thematic, semantic analysis	• Appearance-related CB is aimed at adolescent girls or people who differ in appearance. • CB content is focused on someone's style or body. • Anyone could be a cyberbully. Bullies motivated by social status, seeking attention, feeling better about themselves or finding the act thrilling. • Seeking attention online is a risk factor. • Girls & boys react differently to CB.
Bryce & Fraser (2013)	Examine perception and experiences of CB.	108 students, 9-19 years from schools and colleges in the UK.	Eighteen focus groups	Thematic Analysis	• CB perceived as a common & inevitable. • Impact is psychological and social. • Strategies of victims include blocking & seeking support. • Victimisation by known bullies has greater impact than anonymous bullying. • Lack of face-to-face interaction & inability to witness direct impact on victim when perpetrating CB.
Burnham & Wright (2012)	To add student feedback about CB to previously collected survey data.	13 students (8 boys, 5 girls) from grades 7 & 8 from two middle schools in America.	Two focus groups	Themes generated	• Impact of CB includes depression, anger, worry, confusion and increased chances of suicide. • Occurs wherever there is access to technology. • More likely to confide in peers as adults unable to deal with CB issues.

Mishna, Saini, & Solomon (2009)	Explore youth's views of CB and the factors that influenced telling adults.	38 students (17 boys, 21 girls) in grades 5-8 from 5 urban schools.	Seven focus groups	Grounded theory	• Younger age groups are using technology. • Features of CB are anonymity & 24/7 bullying. • Adults not able to help, may take their computer privileges away or would make things worse.
Naruskov, Luik, Nocentini, & Menesini (2012)	Examine how Estonian students perceptions are affected by definition criteria and type of CB.	20 students (10 boys, 10 girls) aged 12 and 15 years from a school in Estonia.	Two focus groups. Presented ten scenarios depicting criteria for defining and types of CB.	Thematic Analysis	• CB more serious if there is power imbalance, multiple incidents and/or is public. • Intention to hurt differentiates CB from a joke. • Anonymity makes CB more threatening or dismissed as unimportant. • Different forms of CB have different levels of severity. • Strategies to manage CB are blocking, ignoring and excluding the bully.
Nocentini et al. (2010)	Examined perceptions of how to label CB, different forms of CB, and the criteria used for the definition.	70 adolescents (40 boys, 30 girls), 11-18 years from schools in Italy, Spain and Germany.	Nine focus groups using scenarios to facilitate discussion.	Transcriptions were coded in relation to key questions compiled under general headings or themes.	• European countries have different perceptions of what constitutes CB & use different language to describe it. • Features of CB: - Imbalance of power - Intention - Repetition - Publicity - Anonymity

Parris, Varjas, Meyers, & Cutts (2012)	To examine strategies used to cope with CB.	20 students (13 boys, 7 girls), 15-19 years from a suburban high school in America.	Individual semi-structured interviews	Codes developed using inductive-deductive model.	• Reactive coping: avoidance, acceptance, justification & seeking social support. • Least likely to use seeking support. • Preventative coping: talk in person, increased security and awareness. • Perception that there is no way to prevent CB. • Strategies are chosen via problem-focused or emotion focused coping.
Parris, Varjas, & Meyers (2014)	Explore student's suggestions for preventing CB.	40 students (22 boys, 18 girls), 15 to 19 years from two schools.	Individual semi-structured interviews	Grounded Theory	• Student preventative coping: increased security and awareness and talk in person. • Interventions by parents, schools & communities: curriculum and focus on bullies. • Perception that there is no way to reduce CB & adult intervention is ineffective.
Pelfrey & Weber (2015)	To identify strategies used to manage CB and concerns regarding popular strategies cited in the literature.	24 students (8 boys, 16 girls) from three schools in Midwestern America.	Four focus groups.	Grounded Theory approach	• Reaction to CB dependent on many variables but includes ignoring incident and telling adults. • Importance of not reacting out of anger. • Bystanders try to 'stay out of it' but also feel duty to defend their friends. • Parents might get angry, revoke online privileges or tell the school but may also give advice. • Teachers do not have the power to help. • If need advice would ask an older sibling, trusted friend or, as a last resort, parents.

					• High level of parental monitoring of Facebook.
Ševčíková, Šmahel, & Otavová (2012)	Investigate how victims of CB perceived different forms of online attack and in what context they considered them harmful.	16 CB victims (9 boys, 7 girls), 15-17 years from Czech Republic websites.	Two individual interviews conducted via instant messenger.	Grounded Theory	• Impact affected by anonymity and overlap with offline life. • The cyberbully can take control of the content which reduces victim's ability to defend themselves and may increase the audience. • Collective participation more likely. • May occur as an extension of traditional bullying. • Online victimisation discussed in the offline environment, which leads to further victimisation and trauma.
Sleglova & Cerna (2011)	To gain an understanding of victim's experience of CB, coping strategies used and the impact that it has on victims.	15 CB victims (2 boys, 13 girls), 14-18 years from Czech Republic websites.	Individual semi-structured interviews conducted over instant messenger.	Grounded Theory	• CB changes victim's online behaviour. • Psychological impact influenced by intensity, duration, psychosocial context of incident & degree of resilience to stress. • Coping strategies include technical strategies, activity directed at the aggressor, avoiding stressful situations, defensive strategies/ diversion strategies & social support.
Smith et al. (2008)	To gain students perceptions of CB and assess similarities and	47 pupils, 11-15 years from six secondary schools in the UK.	Focus groups, each with 7-8 pupils.	Content analysed to give main themes	• High proportion of pupils experience CB. • Most commonly occurs outside of school. • Girls more involved than boys. • Cyberbullies motivated by lack of confidence, desire for control,

	differences with questionnaire findings.				• entertainment, less fear of getting caught & lack of face-to-face interaction. • Impact the same as traditional bullying. • CB perceived as worse due to anonymity of the perpetrator, not having friends to help, the larger audience and 24/7 nature. • Little can be done to reduce CB. • Strategies include ignoring, blocking, telling someone trustworthy and making bullies aware of the consequences.
Topcu, Yıldırım, & Erdur-Baker (2013)	Examine how CB is conceptualised by adolescents and the likely reasons for CB.	7 CB victims (6 boys, 1 girl), 15 years from high school in Turkey.	Individual semi-structured interviews	Content Analysis	• Motives include joking, intentional harm, revenge & easiness of CB. • Characteristics of cyberbullies: isolated, unloved, rude, thoughtless, arrogant, lack of empathy. • Characteristics of cybervictim: introverted or extroverted, weak, lack knowledge on Internet security. • Preventative strategies: privacy training, punishing and making the bully public.
Vandebosch & Van Cleemput (2008)	Experiences and views of young people on CB.	279 (142 boys, 137 girls) 10-19 years from 10 schools.	53 focus groups.	Analysis focused on general trends as well as possible differences in answers between subgroups	• Many forms of CB. • Interpretation of event depends on multiple variables e.g. kind of event, relationship between those involved, degree to which they felt personally attacked & level of power imbalance.

					(sex, age and education level).	• Cyberbully motives include revenge, fun or desire to display technological skill or power. • Anonymity means anyone can be targeted & increases feelings of powerlessness and frustration for victim. Knowing the perpetrator allows the action to be put into perspective.
Varjas Talley, Meyers, Parris, & Cutts (2010)	Investigate high school student's perceptions of the motivations for CB.	20 students, 15-19 years from grades 10-12 from a suburban high school.	Individual semi-structured interviews	Grounded Theory	• Internal motivations: redirect feelings, revenge, feel better, boredom, instigation, protection, jealousy, seeking approval, trying out a new persona, anonymity/ disinhibition effect. • External motivations: no consequences, non-confrontational, target is different. • Internal motivations reported more frequently than external.
Varjas, Meyers, Kiperman, & Howard (2013)	Explore the experience and perception of LGBTQ student's technology use.	18 teenagers (13 boys, 5 girls), 15-18 years from community organisations for LGBTQ youth in America.	Individual semi-structured interviews	Grounded Theory	• Cyberbullies enabled by anonymity. • CB can spread to large number of people. • CB decreases later in high school. • Motives of CB: sexual orientation and revenge. • Modes of CB: verbal, actions & relational. • Cybervictimisation may turn into traditional victimisation. • Negative cyber actions include verbal harassment & sharing personal information.

2.3 Results

2.3.1 Characteristics of Included Studies

All studies aimed to investigate the experiences, perceptions and views of cyberbullying by children and adolescents. Some studies had additional aims such as to explore cyberbullying prevention methods (Agatston et al., 2007; Parris et al., 2014), to identify strategies used to cope with cyberbullying (Parris et al., 2012; Pelfrey & Weber, 2015) and to examine the perception of different forms and definitions of cyberbullying (Naruskov et al., 2012; Nocentini et al., 2010; Ševčíková et al., 2012). Unfortunately, the majority of studies did not provide a detailed account of the interview protocols used to gather information and meet these aims. However, many appeared to explore general concepts related to cyberbullying, taking a more exploratory approach, rather than focusing on specific events or aspects of the experience. In turn, this is likely to have influenced the broad nature of the findings reported in this synthesis.

The majority of studies stated a definition of cyberbullying, aside from those that were directly investigating participants' views regarding how cyberbullying should be defined. As part of the definition, the medium used to conduct cyberbullying was usually included, with some simply stating it was perpetrated using technology in general (Bryce & Fraser, 2013; Parris et al., 2014), using the Internet alone (Ševčíková et al., 2012; Sleglova & Cerna, 2011), or using the Internet and other digital or communication technologies

such as mobile phones (Agatston et al., 2007; Baas et al., 2013; Berne et al., 2014; Burnham & Wright, 2012; Parris et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2008; Topcu et al., 2013; Varjas et al., 2010; Varjas et al., 2013). The definitions used by the majority of studies also included specific features of the interaction such as power imbalance and intent to cause harm as an integral aspect of cyberbullying.

The majority of studies were conducted in America and Europe, however five studies did not report the research location. Purposeful sampling methods were used, with the majority of studies (n=15) recruiting from educational settings. However, two studies used a self-selecting sample from a Czech website (Naruskov et al., 2012; Nocentini et al., 2010) and another recruited within a community organisation (Varjas et al., 2013). There were differing levels of sample homogeneity, particularly in relation to participant age, with some studies focusing on a single age group (Baas et al., 2013; Berne et al., 2014) and others including those across the child and adolescent age bracket (Bryce & Fraser, 2013; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008). The number of participants varied greatly between studies (from 7-279 participants) dependent on whether focus group (n=11) or individual interview (n=7) methodology was employed and the type of qualitative analysis conducted such as grounded theory (n=8), thematic analysis (n=4) or content analysis (n=2).

2.3.2 Methodological Appraisal of Studies

During the appraisal process, it became clear that the rationale for nearly all studies (n=17) was based upon gaps within the literature rather than to investigate any specific theoretical frameworks. It is likely that this occurred due to cyberbullying being a relatively new phenomenon, which resulted in the exploratory nature of the studies. An exception was Parris et al. (2012) who explicitly discussed and evaluated models of coping that could be applied to cyberbullying. All studies stated at least broad aims, which allowed it to be discerned that the qualitative methodologies chosen were appropriate to meet these aims (Hannes et al., 2010). However, many studies (n=8) failed to justify their methodology.

The majority of studies (n=12) provided general details of the data collection process but would not be replicable based on the information provided. However, three of these studies offered the option of obtaining the interview protocol (Parris et al., 2012; Parris et al., 2014; Varjas et al., 2010). In terms of the participants included, there was an under-representation of adolescents outside of educational settings such as school leavers. Furthermore, in four studies, there was evidence of bias regarding participant recruitment methods such as school staff picking students whom they deemed to be representative (Pelfrey & Weber, 2015), who would be comfortable in a group (Nocentini et al., 2010), or a 'random' selection made by teachers or school social workers without any randomisation procedures reported (Baas et al., 2013; Naruskov et al., 2012).

When working with children and adolescents, ethical issues such as informed consent must be considered (Kirk, 2007). Nine studies obtained consent from parents and assent from children (Baas et al., 2013; Bryce & Fraser, 2013; Burnham & Wright, 2012; Mishna et al., 2009; Parris et al., 2012; Parris et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2008; Varjas et al., 2010; Varjas et al., 2013) however many only obtained verbal assent from the child or adolescent and did not provide evidence regarding how any power differentials between the researcher and child were addressed. Three studies only obtained consent from the participant (Berne et al., 2014; Ševčíková et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2008) and six studies did not discuss the issue in sufficient detail to ascertain methods used (Agatston et al., 2007; Naruskov et al., 2012; Pelfrey & Weber, 2015; Sleglova & Cerna, 2011; Topcu et al., 2013; Vandebosch et al., 2008).

The level of transparency regarding the data analysis and support for findings was varied across studies. Many studies stated the form of analysis but did not provide a justification or sufficient detail regarding how the analysis was carried out. This meant that for many studies it was not possible to deduce if the data analysis was conducted in line with the stated methodology. Particular studies that poorly addressed this issue were Agatston et al. (2007) who did not report the method of analysis and four studies that simply stated that themes were generated (Burnham & Wright, 2012; Nocentini et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2008; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008). The majority of studies (n=14) provided a reasonable to good level of evidence to support findings by the use of extracts from the

transcribed text. Additional methods used to increase believability in the findings included the reporting of frequency with which themes were found (n=6), meeting with participants on more than one occasion (n=2) and having multiple researchers involved in the analysis process (n=8).

A significant limitation across all of the studies was the overall lack of reflexivity on the impact that the researcher may have had on the research process. Only Berne et al. (2014) commented that their "ambition was to be as open as possible to avoid allowing our pre-understanding about appearance-related cyberbullying to influence the process" however they did not elaborate any further. As a result, it cannot be ascertained if the findings reported have been affected by researcher bias (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

Despite the limitations, it was felt that the findings across the studies were valuable and an important contribution to this new area of literature. Furthermore, the results were relatively consistent across the studies despite some only reporting limited findings. As a result, no studies were removed from the synthesis based upon quality.

2.3.3 Synthesis of Findings

During the synthesis process, it became apparent that the eight themes present within the original framework could be best represented as three main themes: Online vs. Traditional Bullying Environment, Risk Factors and Victim's Experience. These main themes consist of subthemes that were also drawn from the original framework. Furthermore, an additional main

theme of Preventative Measures was added to the framework. Table 5

shows the contribution that each paper made to each main and sub-theme.

Table 5: Contribution of Papers to Final Framework

Author	Online vs. Traditional Bullying Environment	Risk Factors				Victim Experience			Preventative Measures
		Online Behaviour & Ability	*Individual Factors*	*Inter-personal Factors*	*School Environment*	*Making Sense of the Cyberbullying Event*	*Reacting to & Coping with Cyber-bullying*	*Impact of Cyber-bullying*	
Agatston et al. (2007)	✓	✓			✓		✓		
Baas et al. (2013)	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	
Berne et al. (2014)	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Bryce & Fraser (2013)	✓						✓	✓	
Burnham & Wright (2012)	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
Mishna et al. (2009)	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓
Naruskov et al. (2012)	✓						✓	✓	
Nocentini et al. (2010)	✓	✓						✓	

Parris et al. (2012)	✓	✓				✓	✓		✓
Parris et al. (2014)	✓								✓
Pelfrey & Weber (2015)					✓	✓	✓		✓
Ševčíková et al. (2012)	✓							✓	
Sleglova & Cerna (2011)							✓	✓	
Smith et al. (2008)	✓		✓				✓	✓	✓
Topcu et al. (2013)	✓		✓	✓					✓
Vandebosch & Van Cleemput (2008)	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Varjas et al. (2010)	✓		✓	✓					
Varjas et al. (2013)	✓	✓	✓		✓				

2.3.4 Main Themes

2.3.4.1 Online vs. Traditional Bullying Environment

The most common theme, reported across sixteen studies, was the difference between online and traditional bullying environments. Cyberbullying may occur on its own or in conjunction with traditional bullying (Ševčíková et al., 2012; Varjas et al., 2013) however it most commonly occurs outside of school and often at home (Agatston et al., 2007; Burnham & Wright, 2012; Smith et al., 2008). This can be particularly invasive for victims (Mishna et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2008), as home is no longer seen as a safe place.

A key difference between the two forms of bullying is that cyberbullying perpetrators have the ability to remain anonymous (Baas et al., 2013; Bryce & Fraser, 2013; Parris et al., 2012; Topcu et al., 2013). Many studies found that young people believed this leads perpetrators to be more disinhibited online and behave in ways that they would not normally (Bryce & Fraser, 2013; Mishna et al., 2009; Parris et al., 2014; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008; Varjas et al. 2013), perhaps due to a reduced fear of consequences (Mishna et al., 2009; Parris et al., 2012; Parris et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2008; Varjas et al., 2010). In terms of the victim, anonymity of the perpetrator has been found to increase the perceived impact of the cyberbullying (Mishna et al., 2009; Naruskov et al., 2012; Nocentini et al., 2010) which may be, at least partly, due to the feeling that the perpetrator could be anyone (Mishna et al., 2009) and the victim cannot know if they would be able to carry out any

threats made (Ševčíková et al., 2012). However, Vandebosch & Van Cleemput (2008) found that victims usually become aware of the perpetrator's identity either due to the way they act online or by being told by a third party. Furthermore, Mishna et al. (2009) note that although students reported anonymity as a central feature of cyberbullying, the experiences that they described took place within their pre-existing social groups and relationships.

Another difference is a lack of non-verbal communication online (Baas et al., 2013; Bryce & Fraser, 2013; Nocentini et al., 2010) meaning that interactions can be easily misinterpreted (Burnham & Wright, 2012; Parris et al., 2014; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008) and the intent of the bully is often ambiguous (Baas et al., 2013; Bryce & Fraser, 2013; Nocentini et al., 2010). In addition, the perpetrator cannot witness the direct impact on the victim (Bryce & Fraser, 2013; Varjas et al., 2010), which may reduce any potential victim empathy (Smith et al., 2008).

In terms of the content of cyberbullying, there are similarities with traditional bullying, including name calling or threats. However, the perpetrators of cyberbullying may also impersonate the victim, hack their account, send explicit or disturbing material or computer viruses (Baas et al., 2013; Berne et al., 2014; Mishna et al., 2009; Topcu et al., 2013; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008; Varjas et al., 2013). Cyberbullying events can also be viewed by a wider audience (Bryce & Fraser, 2013; Ševčíková et al., 2012;

Smith et al., 2008; Topcu et al., 2013; Varjas et al., 2013), which increases the risk that bystanders also become involved (Nocentini et al., 2010; Ševčíková et al., 2012). Furthermore, even if only a single act of cyberbullying takes place, there may be repetitive effects such as the content being spread to numerous people or viewed multiple times (Baas et al., 2013; Bryce & Fraser, 2013). The perpetrator may also have control of the content, which makes it difficult for the victim to remove it from the Internet and/or stop it spreading further (Ševčíková et al., 2012).

2.3.4.2 Risk factors

2.3.4.2.1 Online Behaviour and Ability

Online behaviour and technical ability risk factors were mentioned in seven studies. It was reported that children and adolescents were very familiar with, and are skilled users of, technology (Agaston et al., 2007; Mishna et al., 2009) and that a level of technological skill was required to perpetrate some forms of cyberbullying (Nocentini et al., 2010). However, Topcu et al. (2013) suggested that victims of cyberbullying often lacked knowledge regarding Internet security and that this was a likely risk factor.

Cyberbullying was perceived to most commonly occur on social media sites thus placing its users at risk (Berne et al., 2014, Burnham & Wright, 2012). Other risk factors included people seeking attention online by, for example, uploading photos of themselves to promote their appearance (Berne et al., 2014), higher levels of personal information being disclosed (Varjas et al.,

2013), adding unknown people as friends on social media (Parris et al.,

2012) and spending more time online (Mishna et al., 2009).

2.3.4.2.2 Individual Factors

Seven studies reported individual factors that can increase the risk of

victimisation and perpetration of cyberbullying. Studies tended to focus on

factors related to perpetrators and, in particular, their motive to cyberbully

others. Internal motives, described by Varjas et al. (2010) as "derived from

emotional states", are: wanting to achieve social status and 'likes' on social

media (Berne et al., 2014; Varjas et al., 2010), finding the act of cyberbullying

thrilling and entertaining (Berne et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2008; Vandebosch

& Van Cleemput, 2008; Varjas et al., 2010), making themselves feel better

(Berne et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2008; Varjas et al., 2010), jealousy (Berne et

al., 2014; Varjas et al., 2010), lack of confidence (Smith et al., 2008), desire

for control (Smith et al., 2008) and a desire to display technological skill

(Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008). Varjas et al. (2010), who focused

solely on motives of cyberbullies, also reported redirecting feelings,

protection, trying out a new persona and trying to provoke a response out of

someone as other internal motives.

Cyberbullying behaviour may also be motivated by external factors described

by Varjas et al. (2010) as "factors specific to the situation or the target".

These included characteristics, or presumed characteristics, of the victim

such as their appearance or reputation (Baas et al., 2013; Vandebosch &

Van Cleemput, 2008; Varjas et al., 2010; Varjas et al., 2013). Varjas et al. (2010) also state that the non-confrontational nature and lack of consequences of cyberbullying are external motives. As seen within the online vs. traditional bullying environment theme, these final two external factors are conceptualised by other studies as factors that enable cyberbullies rather the person's motives; however this may be due to Varjas et al. (2010) including situational factors within their definition.

In terms of specific characteristics of those involved in cyberbullying, Topcu et al. (2013) was the only study to report on the perceived characteristics of perpetrators, describing them as "isolated, unloved, lacking in empathy, rude and thoughtless, and arrogant". Victims were described as more likely to be female (Berne et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2008), people who differ in some way such as appearance or sexual orientation (Baas et al., 2013; Berne et al., 2014; Varjas et al., 2013), to be viewed as vulnerable or weak (Baas et al., 2013; Topcu et al., 2013), introverted (and unable to defend themselves) or extraverted (and therefore targeted by envious people) (Topcu et al., 2013).

2.3.4.2.3 Interpersonal Factors

Interpersonal risk factors for cyberbullying victimisation occur at both peer and parental levels. Firstly, peer influences such as peer approval based on the number of 'likes' and positive comments received on social media sites (Berne et al., 2014) and password sharing as a sign of friendship (Mishna et al., 2009), increase behaviours associated with cybervictimisation. In terms

of parental influence, Baas et al. (2013) found that parents were perceived to be unable to judge the severity of online actions, indicating a lack of knowledge of the online world. This may influence parental views on cyberbullying and how they choose to support and/or monitor their child in terms of their Internet use. Interpersonal problems were also reported as a motive to engage in cyberbullying perpetration including negative experiences with the victim (Baas et al., 2013) and revenge, perhaps due to being the victim of cyberbullying themselves (Mishna et al., 2009; Topcu et al., 2013; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008; Varjas et al., 2010).

2.3.4.2.4 School Environment

The influence schools have regarding the risk of cyberbullying victimisation or perpetration was discussed in four studies. Similar to the views held about parents, children and adolescents believed that school personnel are unable to help (Agatston et al., 2007; Mishna et al., 2009; Perlfrey & Weber, 2015). This belief may stem from the perception that it is not the teacher's job to protect against cyberbullying (Perlfrey & Weber, 2015), as it is likely to occur outside of school grounds (Mishna et al., 2009). Furthermore, Pelfrey & Weber (2015) highlight that even if a teacher does try to help, they are required to follow a particular protocol that does not allow them to meet the individual needs of the student. School policy around media use may influence if and/or how cyberbullying is perpetrated during school hours (Varjas et al., 2013) but may also serve as an additional barrier for disclosure from students due to a fear of getting in trouble for breaking the school rules

(Agatston et al., 2007). This overall disconnection between cyberbullying and school is a risk factor for cyberbullying as it may promote the perception that perpetrators are unlikely to face any repercussions for their actions.

2.3.4.3 Victim's Experience

2.3.4.3.1 Making Sense of the Cyberbullying Event

The appraisal process which victims of cyberbullying go through in order to make sense of the event was only vaguely considered within four studies. Burnham & Wright (2012) stated that during cyberbullying victims are concerned with how and why it started, who the perpetrator is and how they should end the cyberbullying however there was no supporting evidence provided. Vandebosch and Van Cleemput (2008) and Pelfrey and Weber (2015) painted a more complicated picture with the finding that cyberbullying events are interpreted in different ways dependent on the precise circumstances such as the relationship with the perpetrator and the degree that the victim feels personally attacked.

Parris et al. (2012) propose that in line with Lazarus & Folkman's (1984) Transactional Model of Coping, victims of cyberbullying go through an appraisal process leading to a choice of coping strategy. Although the authors did not specifically address this part of the model, appraisals that led students to pick certain coping strategies were elicited. For example, participants chose acceptance strategies after the appraisal that cyberbullying could not be stopped.

2.3.4.3.2 Reacting to & Coping with Cyberbullying

The sub-theme of reacting to and coping with cyberbullying was reported across twelve studies. Parris et al. (2012) conducted a good quality study investigating this topic and identified four reactive coping strategies used by adolescents: avoidance, acceptance, justification and social support. Avoidance strategies were defined as an attempt to avoid negative outcomes or stop further incidents of cyberbullying by deleting messages or accounts, blocking perpetrators and ignoring the event. These strategies were also found in eight other studies (Agatston et al., 2007; Bryce & Fraser, 2013; Burnham & Wright, 2012; Naruskov et al., 2012; Pelfrey & Weber, 2015; Sleglova & Cerna, 2011; Smith et al., 2008; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008). Acceptance strategies aim to reduce focus on the cyberbullying by directing attention towards other positive aspects of life or focusing on the temporary nature of cyberbullying. Acceptance strategies were also found by Sleglova & Cerna (2011) but conceptualised as "defensive strategies". Justification strategies allow the victim to evaluate and reframe the cyberbullying to reduce its impact, for example by discrediting the perpetrator or making it into a joke. Sleglova & Cerna (2011) also reported that victims may develop negative emotions towards the bully to help them cope e.g. by giving them a derogatory label. Finally, victims used social support for advice or action as a coping strategy. This strategy was supported across five other studies (Agatston et al., 2007; Bryce & Fraser, 2013; Burnham & Wright, 2012; Pelfrey & Weber, 2015; Smith et al., 2008). However, there are barriers to seeking social support from parents based on the perception that

they are unable to help due to a lack of understanding, that they may take away online privileges, react in a way that makes the situation worse or be unable to trace the perpetrator (Agatston et al., 2007; Baas et al., 2013; Burnham & Wright, 2012; Mishna et al., 2009; Parris et al., 2012; Pelfrey & Weber, 2015; Sleglova & Cerna, 2011). As a result, many children and adolescents preferred to go to peers or older siblings for support (Burnham & Wright, 2012; Pelfrey & Weber, 2015).

Other strategies not identified by Parris et al. (2012) were technical methods, such as reporting the perpetrator to administrators and asking for content to be removed (Agatston et al., 2007; Burnham & Wright, 2012; Sleglova & Cerna, 2011). However, Sleglova & Cerna (2011) note that this is often not a permanent solution as perpetrators can create a new account. Two studies also reported that victims might directly address the bully either by telling them to stop (Sleglova & Cerna, 2011) or becoming either verbally or physically aggressive (Burnham & Wright, 2012; Sleglova & Cerna, 2011).

Finally, Berne et al. (2014) was the only study that reported on gender differences in reactions to cyberbullying. They found that boys may not take offence at all or, if they were offended, were more likely to react by "acting out" and using violence towards the perpetrator. In comparison, girls were more likely to get offended but be quieter about the incident. It should be noted that these results were based on appearance-related cyberbullying and therefore may not apply to other forms of this behaviour.

2.3.4.3.3 Impact of Cyberbullying

The impact of cyberbullying on victims was reported across ten studies. The most prominent impact was psychological with victims reporting to have felt fear, anxiety, sadness, anger, shame, hurt, reduced self-confidence and, on some occasions, feeling suicidal (Baas et al., 2013; Berne et al., 2014; Bryce & Fraser, 2013; Burnham & Wright, 2012; Nocentini et al., 2010; Sleglova & Cerna, 2011). Cyberbullying also negatively impacts victims socially with a loss of trust in friends (Baas et al., 2013; Bryce & Fraser, 2013; Sleglova & Cerna, 2011) and there is the potential for a victim's reputation to be damaged (Naruskov et al., 2012). Finally, there may also be changes to victims' online behaviours such as reducing the amount of information they disclose online, restricting how much contact they have with others online and assessing people in order to ascertain if they are potential cyberbullies (Sleglova & Cerna, 2011).

The factors that mediate the degree of impact were less well explored across studies. Sleglova & Cerna (2011) reported that the psychological impact was dependent on the intensity and duration of the incident(s) and the victim's resilience. Furthermore, different forms of cyberbullying may have differing impacts (Naruskov et al., 2012) and factors such as perpetrator anonymity (Naruskov et al., 2012; Ševčíková et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2008; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008) and if the event is public (Nocentini et al., 2010) can affect how the event is interpreted and the subsequent impact. Of interest, Ševčíková et al. (2012) reported that the greater connection

between cyberbullying incidents and the 'real world', the greater the harm. However, the authors did not specifically define the concept of harm and therefore this finding requires further exploration before any conclusions can be drawn.

2.3.4.4 Preventative Measures

Preventative measures that could be introduced to stop cyberbullying were discussed in seven studies with Parris et al. (2014) focusing exclusively on this issue. Preventative action that children and adolescents could take included talking in person to address any interpersonal issues and misunderstandings that have occurred online (Parris et al., 2012; Parris et al., 2014). This method would overcome the communication barriers faced online, however it relies on knowing the identity of the person and being able to meet face to face. Children and adolescents can also increase their online security by using passwords, privacy settings, reducing the amount of disclosure and being aware of who they are in contact with online (Parris et al., 2012; Parris et al., 2014). However, as noted by Topcu et al. (2013), adults may need to provide information in order for children and adolescents to carry this out.

Preventative measures that adults could take were also reported across studies. An interesting theme reported by Parris et al. (2014) was "blame people not technology" which highlights that adults should focus their actions against the potential perpetrators of cyberbullying rather than the negative

aspects of technology. Specifically, adults could educate students regarding the impact of cyberbullying (Burnham & Wright, 2012; Parris et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2008); however Parris et al. (2014) note that the educators would have to be experienced in technology. Adults, in particular parents, may also take on a monitoring role and/or restrict use of certain websites (Burnham & Wright, 2012; Pelfrey & Weber, 2015).

In three studies, a proportion of the children and adolescents reported the belief that nothing that can be done to prevent cyberbullying (Mishna et al., 2009; Parris et al., 2012; Parris et al., 2014). This belief may link with the perception that cyberbullying is inevitable (Bryce & Fraser, 2013), bullies are able to evade security measures (Parris et al., 2014), cyberbullies will not be caught due to anonymity (Mishna et al., 2009), adults are unable to help (Agatston et al., 2007; Baas et al., 2013; Burnham & Wright, 2012; Mishna et al., 2009; Parris et al., 2012; Pelfrey & Weber, 2015; Sleglova & Cerna, 2011) and cyberbullies will continue despite consequences (Parris et al., 2014).

2.4 Discussion

2.4.1 Findings

The results of this synthesis highlight fundamental differences between traditional bullying and cyberbullying. Not only does the online environment facilitate additional bullying behaviours such as hacking and impersonating others, the incident may reach a wider audience, with the victim not in control of the content. Furthermore, perpetrators have the ability to remain anonymous, which may produce a disinhibition effect. These findings reflect much of the quantitative literature as reviewed by Kowalski et al. (2014) and support the view of Cross et al. (2015) that the online environment should be seen as a distinct level of influence on cyberbullying victimisation and/or perpetration within the Social Ecological Model.

Further evidence to support the Social Ecological Model proposed by Baldry et al. (2015) and Cross et al. (2015), was the finding that there were different types of risk factor which mapped onto levels within an individual's ecological system: online behaviour and technical ability, individual factors, interpersonal factors and school environment. The studies included risk factors for both victimisation and perpetration of cyberbullying; however, aside from the evidence regarding individual motives and characteristics of perpetrators, much of the evidence pertained to victimisation. Unfortunately, interpersonal factors did not appear to be explicitly explored by any of the studies and therefore the evidence base for this sub-theme was tentative. However, both peer and parental influences were noted, indicating that this is

an important area to explore further. The sub-theme School Environment represents another level of influence and is consistent with the views of Baldry et al. (2015) that factors such as school policy may be a risk factor for if, or how, cyberbullying is perpetrated.

The theme Victim's Experience depicts the process that victims go through from initially trying to understand the cyberbullying incident to choosing a strategy to manage and cope with it and the potential impact of cyberbullying. Unfortunately, the studies reviewed did not gather in-depth information about the intricacies of this process and instead focused on developing lists of coping strategies and potential impacts of cyberbullying. Nevertheless, when coupled with the Risk Factors theme, there is some evidence to support the distinct phases of the victimisation process model suggested by Kowalski et al. (2014) i.e. that risk factors lead to a cyberbullying event which then leads to appraisal and decision making processes and finally long term outcomes. However, much more detailed qualitative studies are required to explore this process in sufficient depth before the model is fully supported. More detailed studies would also allow the evaluation of whether the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping as discussed by Raskauskas & Huynh (2015) is applicable to cyberbullying. Regardless of the specific model used, the Impact of Cyberbullying sub-theme was clear and well supported across the studies with the results reflecting quantitative findings (Kowalski et al., 2014).

The final main theme, Preventative Measures, seems particularly important given that cyberbullying was deemed a common occurrence and Bryce & Fraser (2013) report that it is perceived as an inevitable and normal part of being online. However, the finding that participants across three of the studies believed that nothing could be done to prevent cyberbullying suggests that those in positions of authority such as parents and teachers may be a long way off fully understanding and developing effective interventions for the problem.

Overall, the results suggest that both process model of cyberbullying victimisation based on the General Aggression Model proposed by Kowalski et al. (2014) and the Social Ecological Theory as proposed by Baldry et al. (2015) and Cross et al. (2015) are useful frameworks in which to understand cyberbullying. However, rather than being distinct models, it would be beneficial to merge their key concepts. Specifically, it would be helpful to address how levels of influence within the ecological framework impact on the cyberbullying process, not just at the risk factor stage, before the event has occurred, as suggested by Kowalski et al. (2014) and Baldry et al. (2015), but also at later stages such as during the event appraisal process. For instance, as cyberbullying is an interpersonal event, it could be suggested that following the victim's appraisal of the situation and deciding on a coping strategy, their actions could subsequently interact with peer and parental influences. This interaction may in turn mediate the relationship between the coping strategy chosen and the long term/distal outcomes. An

example of this may be if a cyberbullying victim's appraisal leads them to use an avoidance coping strategy of deleting their social media account, this may impact their other, positive social relationships maintained via that medium and therefore they may be more likely to suffer from negative psychological outcomes compared to someone who does not rely on that method of social communication. This suggestion requires further exploration in future studies. It should also be noted that based upon the studies included in the qualitative synthesis there was insufficient evidence to support any clear conclusions regarding models of cyberbullying perpetration.

2.4.2 Clinical Implications

A number of clinical implications can be gleaned from the findings of this review. Firstly, it was clear that both parents and teachers, who are perceived as inept regarding online issues, need to make attempts to fully understand young people's online worlds and the technology that they are using, as only then will they be perceived as a viable source of help when children and adolescents face cyberbullying. Adults in positions of authority such as parents, teachers and medical professionals also need to be mindful of cyberbullying as a potential contributory factor to any psychological, behavioural or social difficulties that a child or adolescent presents with. Finally, as reported by Parris et al. (2014), cyberbullying interventions need to focus on reducing the cyberbullying behaviour and not on the dangers of technology. Therefore, interventions should equip children and adolescents with proactive skills to stay safe online e.g. through the use of privacy

settings, but also aim to educate children and adolescents regarding the potential impact that their behaviour online may have on others.

2.4.3 Limitations of the Current Review

A key limitation of the current review is that studies that were not published in English were excluded, which resulted in three studies identified in the literature search being omitted. Furthermore, grey literature was excluded which may result in publication bias being present. A number of the studies were conducted when the cyberbullying literature was still in its infancy and as a result, the studies focused on general issues relating to the topic. This meant that only tentative evidence was obtained for some of the themes related to specific processes compared to abundant evidence within others. Furthermore, 15 of the 18 studies used general samples of children and adolescents meaning that the results of studies might not be based upon direct, personal experience of cyberbullying.

Finally, the synthesis did not exclude any studies based upon methodological quality. Using a more structured methodological quality appraisal tool that included scoring and subsequently weighting study contribution may have provided a greater level of rigor and suggested studies that could have been removed from the analysis on this basis. However, as discussed by Dixon-Woods et al. (2004), whilst there is some level of consensus among qualitative researchers regarding the importance of using appraisal tools, they should be used in order to "cue attention to the range of dimensions of

qualitative research that require appraisal" rather than used to explicitly grade studies. Furthermore, even if the measurement of quality can be agreed upon, many propose that studies should not be excluded on the basis of quality, which might result in important findings being discounted due to "surface mistakes" (Dixon-Woods, Agarwal, Jones, Young, & Sutton, 2005).

2.4.4 Future Research

The process of conducting this review has highlighted the need for further qualitative studies regarding the topic of cyberbullying. In particular, future studies should seek to examine more specific concepts such as the initial appraisal process when a cyberbullying incident is experienced. This could be achieved by using in-depth interviews with people who have experienced direct cyberbullying. Furthermore, further investigation is needed into the validity of the Social Ecological Model of cyberbullying proposed by Baldry et al. (2015) and Cross et al. (2015) and how its concepts can be incorporated into individual process models of cyberbullying.

As much of the literature focuses on victim's experiences, it would be beneficial to examine perpetrators' experiences of cyberbullying. As demonstrated by Topcu et al. (2013), appropriate participants who are willing to discuss this issue may be difficult to recruit due to the deviant nature of the topic, however, novel methodologies such as anonymous interviews conducted over instant messenger as used by Ševčíková et al. (2012) and Sleglova & Cerna (2011) may help to overcome these issues.

2.4.5 Conclusion

This qualitative synthesis regarding children and adolescents experiences and views of cyberbullying provided an overall insight into both the online environmental and individual factors that may increase the likelihood of cyberbullying occurring, the experience of cyberbullying victims and possible ways to prevent cyberbullying. Although there was a reasonable degree of consensus throughout the eighteen studies included, further research is now required to examine this experience in more detail, including from the perspective of the cyberbully. This would allow the individual process and ecological system models of cyberbullying to be further evaluated and developed.

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3. Thesis Aims

The reported qualitative research synthesis focused on cyberbullying, a particular risk that children and adolescents may face on the Internet. However, with the ever-expanding use of the Internet, the range of both positive and negative experiences for users also increases. Although there is a wealth of literature regarding Internet use by people within the general population, a particularly interesting but under-studied topic, is the use of the Internet by marginalised populations. This research project focuses on the use of the Internet by young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or who are questioning their sexuality (LGBTQ). The following research questions aim to provide an insight into both the opportunities and risks faced by the LGBTQ population online:

1) How do LGBTQ young people use the Internet?

2) How do LGBTQ young people communicate online and what impact does it have on their life?

3) What risks are LGBTQ young people exposed to and how do they stay safe online?

4. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ) Young People on the Internet: Insights from European Focus Groups

Written in accordance with author guidelines for Computers in Human Behavior (Appendix A)

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Abstract

The current study aimed to explore how young LGBTQ people use the Internet, how they communicate online and the impact that it has on their lives. It also aimed to identify the risks that young LGBTQ people face online and how they stay safe. A total of 41 participants, aged 15-26 years, who identify as LGBTQ took part in five focus groups. The data, which was a subset of a much larger dataset, was subjected to secondary analysis using Framework Analysis. Four main themes emerged from the data: Digital World as Part of Daily Life, In Control of Their Online World, Seeking Connection and Navigating Risk. The findings suggest that LGBTQ young people have embraced the Internet as part of their daily life and are provided with opportunities that are specifically beneficial to that population as it allows them to overcome or compensate for barriers within their offline lives. However, participants also reported to having to navigate a number of risk factors, namely sexualised content from other, older Internet users. It was concluded that a balance between empowerment and safeguarding must be obtained and the role that a young person's offline social network plays in this process is discussed.

Keywords: LGBTQ, Internet, Control, Social Network, Risk

Highlights

- Young LGBTQ people have embraced the Internet as part of everyday life.

- Young LGBTQ people are in control of their online world and feel empowered by it.

- Young LGBTQ people use the Internet to seek connection with others.

- Young LGBTQ people are confident in managing online risk.

- A balance between empowerment and safeguarding must be found.

4.1 Introduction

The Internet is becoming an increasingly important aspect of people's lives. In 2015, it was estimated that 78% of adults in the UK use the Internet everyday or almost everyday compared to just 35% in 2006 (Office for National Statistics, 2015). Furthermore, the Internet is becoming increasingly accessible (Hasebrink, 2014; Lenhart & Page, 2015) with 96% of people aged 16-24 in the UK accessing the Internet using mobile technology such as smartphones or tablets (Office for National Statistics, 2015).

The Internet presents a vast range of opportunities and benefits for people however, exposure to risks online is also prevalent and some groups of people may be more vulnerable to negative experiences and harm than others (Priebe & Svedin, 2012; Whittle, Hamilton-Giachritsis, Beech, & Collings, 2013). One such group is children and adolescents who may be vulnerable online due to their developmental stage. For example, Internet users who are entering adolescence may be at increased risk online due to greater impulsivity, attention seeking and sexual interest at that age (Young Minds Charity, 2016). Livingstone and Palmer (2012) suggest that vulnerability to harm online is a dynamic process that should be contextualised within the "emotional, psychological and physical developmental stage" of the child. Furthermore, if risky situations are encountered at an appropriate time during a child's development, the experience may be in fact an opportunity to develop coping skills and resilience (Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, & Ólafsson, 2011;Vandoninck &

d'Haenens, 2015). Therefore, akin to all areas of a child or young persons life, safe Internet use can be viewed as a balancing act between opportunity and risk which is likely to be influenced by numerous individual and environmental factors (Livingston, 2008).

4.1.1 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Young People

A particular subgroup within the child and adolescent population who are likely to have a different developmental experience to that of their peers are those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or who are questioning their sexuality (LGBTQ). In addition to the typical developmental processes that all children and adolescents go through such as individuation, LGBTQ young people also undergo a process of alternative sexual identity formation (Cserni & Talmund, 2015). There are a number of different theories of sexual identity formation however Cass (1979) proposed one of the original, and most widely cited, models which states that individuals go through a six stage process from initial confusion through to gradual tolerance, acceptance, pride and finally synthesis of their sexual identity. A key limitation of this, and other similar models, is that it conceptualises identity formation as occurring in linear stages rather than as a fluid and complex process that occurs in the context of a number of individual and environmental factors (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005).

Subsequently, D'Augelli (1994) suggested a life span approach that comprises of a number of developmental stages that can occur at any time in a person's life and in any order. It proposes that each specific stage may be developed to a greater or lessor degree dependent on individual and social circumstances. This model also emphasises that an individual's identity can be fluid and differ across contexts, for example, a persons level of disclosure about their sexual identity may vary dependent on the audience (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). This model is consistent with the view that a person's ecological system, such as views and attitudes of family and friends, cultural influences and societal influences, is also a key factor within the process of sexual identity formation (Alderson, 2003).

The life span and ecological models of sexual identity development highlight the importance of understanding the range of environments and social networks that sexual identity development can occur. A recent change to the vast majority of young people's ecological system has come from the introduction of the Internet and, as a result, the process of sexual identity formation now takes place within both their offline and online worlds (DeHaan, Kuper, Magee, Bigelow, & Mustanski (2013). This demonstrates that the Internet presents many opportunities for LGBTQ young people. However, given that developmental processes have been implicated in the type of risks faced online, it could be suggested that LGBTQ young people may face increased and/or different risks to their peers.

4.1.2 Benefits of the Internet for LGBTQ People

For the LGBTQ population, the Internet presents a number of opportunities and benefits. A consistent finding across the literature is the sense of social support that young LGBTQ people can find online. Hillier, Mitchell, & Ybarra (2012) conducted focus groups with lesbian, gay and bisexual youth and found that they use the Internet to find "like-minded individuals and get support online that was not available from offline friends". An LGBTQ social network can also show these young people that they are not alone (Mustanki, Lyons, & Garcia, 2011) and allows them to find alternative views to the negative and stigmatising responses they may receive offline (Hillier et al., 2012). In turn, LGBTQ youth are able to overcome feelings of isolation, loneliness and stigma within their offline lives and achieve a sense of belonging and mental wellbeing (Chong, Zhang, Mak, & Pang, 2015; Craig & McInroy, 2014; Hanckel & Morris, 2014; Miller, 2016; Mustanski. Lyons, & Garcia, 2011). Furthermore, the Internet provides them with the opportunity to become involved in raising political awareness of, or fighting for, LGBTQ equal rights (Hanckel & Morris, 2014; Mehra, Merkel, & Bishop, 2004). However, a study by DeHaan et al. (2013) in which 32 LGBT youth aged 16-24 years were interviewed, found that social support or connection online may not be as meaningful as offline support due to the lack of direct interaction.

Another key finding within the literature is the influence that the Internet can have on an individual's sexual identity development and the 'coming out'

process. The experience of forming an LGBTQ sexual identity in a heteronormative society has been described as a confusing and lonely time (Bamms, Jonas, Utz, Bos, & van der Vuurst, 2011). Qualitative studies have shown that at the early stages of exploring an alternative sexual identity, the Internet functions as a tool to seek further information, obtain advise from and learn about experiences of others, and to validate their sexual attractions and preferences by, for example, looking at sexual content online (Hacknel & Morris, 2014; Hillier et al., 2012; McKie, Lachowsky, & Milhausen, 2015; Miller, 2016; Mustanski et al., 2011; Szulc & Dhoest, 2013). The actual process of 'coming out' as LGBTQ may also be greatly facilitated by the Internet. Craig & McInroy (2014) interviewed 19 LGBTQ people aged 18-22 years and found that they disclosed their sexual identity on the Internet before doing so in their offline lives as way to gauge others reactions and prepare themselves. DeHaan et al. (2013) also found that LGBT youth used the Internet to 'come out' to people within their offline lives either directly through, for example, electronic messaging, or indirectly by, for example, putting a relationship status on social media. They described coming out online as easier than doing so face-to-face as they were able to reach a wider audience all at the same time and avoid witnessing the person's, potentially negative, reaction.

Interestingly, Szulc & Dhoest's (2013) mixed methods study found that following 'coming out' many of their participants, particularly those who were younger, no longer looked for lesbian, gay or bisexual related information on

the Internet. Similarly, older participants no longer looked for general lesbian, gay or bisexual information but rather continued to use it to find specific social, legal or cultural information. The authors concluded that online interactions were less important and were preferably complementary to offline contacts following the 'coming out' process. However, this finding is likely to depend on the social and cultural environment that the participants live in and their experience following disclosure of their sexual identity.

The Internet also provides the opportunity to find sexual and/or romantic partners. This may benefit LGBTQ people in particular as there may be fewer ways to meet potential partners offline and due to the potential stigma or even danger of trying to initiate a relationship in person (Hillier et al., 2012). Korchmaros, Ybarra, & Mitchell (2015) investigated how the Internet affects romantic relationships in a study of 5091 American adolescents (13-18 years). They found that LGBTQ adolescents were more likely than their non-LGBTQ peers to have initiated romantic relationships online (15.1% vs. 3.4%) perhaps due to it facilitating a better way to meet other LGBTQ people. However, both Korchmaros et al. (2015) and Ybarra & Mitchell (2015) found that, for their adolescent participants, many LGBTQ people still use more traditional methods of meeting a romantic partner such as at school. A study by Bamms et al. (2011) suggests that different age groups of LGBTQ people use the Internet differently, and that older same sex attracted people (25-59 years) were more likely to use the Internet for sexual contacts compared to younger users (16-24 years). However, McKie et al. (2015) reported that

across all nine of their focus groups with young gay men aged 18-24 years, participants discussed the ease of finding sexual encounters online and the benefits of this. Therefore, it is likely that the person's psychosocial situation, rather than their age, determines whether they look for friendship or sexual partners online.

Unsurprisingly, given the level of information and advice sought through the Internet, it has also become a key source of sexual health information for LGBTQ youth (Rose & Friedman, 2012). The Internet not only provides more targeted sexual health information that may not be available offline, it also allows the information to be accessed anonymously, which removes the fear of confidentiality breaches (Mitchell, Ybarra, Korchmaros, & Kosciw, 2014; Rose & Friedman, 2012). Mustanski et al. (2011) conducted a mixed methods study with young men (18-24 years) who have sex with men, recruited from an HIV testing clinic. They found that 88% of the sample used the Internet to find information on HIV/AIDS including searching for facts, looking up symptoms they were experiencing, finding health centres and learning about ways to reduce the risk of contracting the illness. As a result of this and other similar findings, the efficacy and acceptability of online sexual health interventions for LGBTQ youth are now being investigated (Mustanski, Greene, Ryan, & Whitton, 2015).

It is clear from the benefits discussed that LGBTQ people use the Internet to "overcome barriers faced or to supplement areas that are deprived in their

offline lives" (Hillier et al., 2012). Across the literature, it has been reported that particular characteristics of the Internet, namely the ability to remain anonymous, the ability to control the level of personal disclosure and the perception that it is a safe and non-judgemental environment, are key components which must be present in order for these benefits to occur (Bamms et al., 2011; Hanckel & Morris, 2014; Hillier et al., 2012; McKie et al., 2015; Pingel, Bauermeister, Johns, Eisenberg, & Leslie-Santana, 2012; Szulc & Dhoest, 2013; Ybarra, Mitchell, Palmer, & Reisner, 2015).

4.1.3 Risks of Internet Use for LGBTQ People

It is well documented that LGBTQ youth face increased risk of victimisation in their offline lives; however, they also face increased risk online which is associated with poorer psychological wellbeing (Priebe & Svedin, 2014). Cyberbullying is one such area of increased risk with a study by Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve, & Coulter (2012) finding that of the 20406 American school pupils surveyed, 33.1% of those who identified as non-heterosexual experienced cyberbullying compared to 14.5% of heterosexual peers. Similarly, a survey by Cooper & Blumenfeld (2012) of LGBT youth (11-18 years) found that 39% received angry, rude or vulgar messages and 21% received intimidating or threatening messages at least once or twice per week. These experiences were linked with psychological, social and academic problems. Furthermore, Mitchell, Ybarra, & Korchmaros (2013) highlighted that LGBT youth (aged 13-18 years) were particularly at risk for sexual harassment via the Internet in comparison to their heterosexual peers.

Unfortunately, LGBTQ people who experience homophobic cyberbullying also face additional barriers to reporting the incidents: the risk of having to 'come out' as LGBTQ to others and the risk that parents terminate their Internet use, which may be integral to their belonging to the LGBTQ community (Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012).

Another potential risk reported by Ybarra & Mitchell (2015) in their survey of 5078 American teenagers (13-18 years), is that young lesbian, gay and bisexual people who used the Internet to meet potential partners were more likely than a heterosexual comparison group, to have sexual conversations with people who are five or more years older than them. Pingel et al. (2012) also highlighted this issue with young gay, bisexual or transsexual men who discussed the "in your face" sexual climate and comments from older men on websites that were designed to facilitate friendship and romantic relationships. These findings raise the issue of a lack of developmentally appropriate communities and resources for young LGBTQ people online.

Given that young LGBTQ people often turn to the Internet for support in the first instance, they may find these negative experiences more problematic and have fewer outlets to manage the experience in comparison to their heterosexual peers (Kuper & Mustanski, 2014). However, it appears that young LGBTQ people when evaluating the risks online, view it as a safer environment than their offline world due to the ability to use technical

methods such as blocking to discontinue contact with perpetrators of harassment or abuse (Hillier et al., 2012).

4.1.4 Aim of Current Study

Overall, the current literature highlights that LGBTQ young people are likely to benefit from population specific opportunities, such as in relation to their sexuality. However, they are also exposed to significant risks, often more so than their heterosexual peers. To date, there are relatively few qualitative research studies published exploring the concept of how the Internet benefits LGBTQ young people and how they balance the opportunities it provides with the risks that they face. The aim of the current study was address this gap in the literature by reporting on findings from focus groups conducted with LGBTQ youth in a number of counties across Europe. The principal research aim was to explore the experiences of LGBTQ young people on the Internet and more specifically this study sought to answer:

1) How do LGBTQ young people use the Internet?

2) How do LGBTQ young people communicate online and what impact does it have on their life?

3) What risks are LGBTQ young people exposed to and how do they stay safe online?

4.2 Method

4.2.1 Study Design

The study was qualitative in design and used Framework Analysis (Ritchie &

Spencer, 1994) to conduct a secondary analysis of data collected from focus

groups.

4.2.2 Participants

A total of 41 participants, aged 15-26 years, who identify as LGBTQ took part

in five focus groups conducted across Germany, Italy, Sweden and Russia.

All participants were recruited from community organisations for LGBTQ

young people. The sample consists of males and females however

participants in the Germany focus group chose to not disclose their gender.

All participants reported to be regular users of the Internet. Group

demographics are reported in Table 6.

Table 6: Group Demographics

Group	Location	Total Participants	Male	Female	Age (years)
1	Germany	16	Unknown	Unknown	15-26
2	Italy 1	4	0	4	16-19
3	Italy 2	6	6	0	16-19
4	Sweden	8	4	4	15-17
5	Russia	7	0	7	17-20

4.2.3 Procedure

The data available for secondary analysis was originally collected as part of a larger study called Risk-taking Online Behaviour Empowerment through Research and Training (ROBERT) in 2010-2012, funded by the European Commission Safer Internet Programme, which aimed to investigate Internet use by vulnerable young people (http://childcentre.info/robert/). For the current study, a subset of five focus groups conducted with LGBTQ young people were identified within the original dataset to be analysed independently.

The semi-structured interview protocol used to collect the data was examined to ensure that the current study aims could be met (Appendix C.2). The ethical issue of informed consent was considered however, as the participants had consented for their data to be used to inform research reports and as the research topic was comparable to that of the original project, it was deemed that the original consent given by participants was appropriate. Ethical approval was obtained from the REC of the School of Health in Social Science, University of Edinburgh (Appendix C.1) and the ROBERT principal investigator granted permission for the data to be accessed from the secure online repository.

4.2.4 Data Analysis

Anonymised transcripts of the five focus groups were uploaded to an encrypted secure online platform that facilitates qualitative data analysis

(www.dedoose.com). Framework Analysis, developed by Ritchie & Spencer (1994), was used to analyse the focus group data as it provides a rigorous, systematic and transparent method for analysing qualitative data (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Rabiee (2004) and Fubar (2010) describe a process which begins with the researcher familiarising themselves with the dataset. The principal researcher achieved this by reading each of the transcripts several times and noting down the main ideas within the dataset. This process was deemed particularly important given that the researcher had not been involved in the data collection process and field notes were not available to provide additional context. Subsequently, the principal researcher used one focus group to develop a theoretical framework by reading the transcript and noting the main ideas or themes that were present. The Swedish focus group was used to create the original theoretical framework as it included participants from both genders. The original draft theoretical framework (Appendix C.3) included a number of main themes and subthemes. This draft theoretical framework was then systematically applied to each of the other raw data transcripts in a process called indexing. This involved adding codes representing the main and sub-themes from the draft theoretical framework to sections of transcript within the Dedoose platform. As this indexing process was completed for each data transcript, adaptations to the draft theoretical framework were made allowing similar themes to be merged and new themes to emerge to increase the 'fit' of the theoretical framework to the data. An example of this process is represented in Appendix C.4. Within the Dedoose platform, all extracts from across transcripts representing individual

themes/codes are charted together allowing the researcher to interpret the data as a whole. In the last stage of the analysis, the final theoretical framework was reviewed to ensure that it was representative of the original dataset and then confirmed. The synthesis of the data using the theoretical framework allowed both a descriptive and interpretative account of the data to be developed (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

In order to increase the validity of the secondary analysis, the principal researcher liaised with the second author, who was involved in the primary study, to understand the context in which the data was collected as suggested by Hinds, Vogel, & Clarke-Steffen (1997). Furthermore, during the analysis process, the rationale for the theoretical framework developed by the principal researcher was discussed with the wider research team who also reviewed subsections of the indexing process using the Dedoose platform.

4.2.5 Researcher Background

It is important to consider how the researcher's experience and views may influence the research process (Morrow, 2005). Whilst completing this research project, the principal researcher had worked as a trainee clinical psychologist across a number of healthcare settings. Through clinical practice, the important role that the Internet plays in young people's lives and the potential benefits for marginalised groups within society had become

apparent. This view has evolved through working with young people who have connected to others who are experiencing similar mental or physical health problems via the Internet, which provided them with support that they may not otherwise have had in their offline social network. Unfortunately, the risks associated with Internet use for vulnerable populations, such as exploitation and bullying, are also apparent and therefore it is important that both young people themselves and the adults around them, are educated on how to use the Internet safely.

4.3 Results

A total of four main themes and eight subthemes are present within the final theoretical framework as represented in Table 7.

Table 7: Final Theoretical Framework

Main Theme	Sub-themes
Digital World As Part of Daily Life	
In Control of Their Online World	*Ability to tailor online identity* *Tensions with parents over control of the online world* *Online environment facilitates control & confidence*
Seeking Connection	*Sense of belonging* *Importance of offline social networks*
Navigating Risk Online	*Acceptance of online risks vs. suspicion of others* *Firm rules to manage risk with confidence* *Offline contacts protect against online risks*

4.3.1 Digital World as Part of Daily Life

Across all focus groups, the significant role that the Internet plays in young people's lives was evident in relation to both general everyday tasks and their social networks:

> Group 3: *"You can ask about anything from a cake recipe to answers you need for your Greek homework."*

Group 1: *"You can really stay in touch with people, even if you don't live around the corner from each other."*

Furthermore, participants discussed how the Internet has opened up a world related to their sexuality. This included finding appropriate information related to sexuality, perhaps not easily accessible in their offline lives:

Group 3: *"…without the Internet to allow me to find books, films on homosexuality and stuff like that, I probably wouldn't have ever been able to find them."*

It is also likely that through access to LGBTQ specific online environments, participants received information about their sexuality on a more informal basis via social learning. In addition, one participant discussed her enjoyment when exploring her sexuality online through her blog:

Group 4: *"I blog about my short sex stories so to me it's just wonderful…erotic short stories and fans-fiction are very popular online."*

This also highlights the feeling of liberation and openness the Internet can provide for young people who wish to explore their sexuality and/or talk about sex.

4.3.2 In Control of Their Online World

4.3.2.1 Ability to tailor online identity

The Internet presents a unique opportunity for young LGBTQ people who are

undergoing a time of personal and sexual development, which is perhaps

different to their peers, as it allows them to present different aspects of

themselves across different online domains. This means that they can have

an online LGBTQ sexual identity whilst having the option to control where

and to who this information is disclosed:

> Group 4: *"If I was like going to talk about my sexual preferences…I do that on chat, because* (members of my family) *have me on Facebook… and not one of them knows about it."*

> Group 3: *" I have two Facebook accounts, because one I don't let on that I'm gay."*

The ability to tailor your online identity is likely to be crucial for young LGBTQ

people who are not ready to disclose their sexuality, as it allows them to

maintain their previous self-representation towards others whilst also

exploring alternative identities. Whilst this generally appeared to be

empowering for the participants, one person discussed their sadness at

having to do so:

> Group 3: *"It was depressing having a secret group…I wanted people to know that I was part of this group and on the other I didn't."*

This highlights the dilemma that young LGBTQ people face regarding the

desire to be honest and open about this important part of themselves to

others verses the safety of being in control of their LGBTQ identity, facilitated by the anonymity of the Internet.

Interestingly, a participant within the German focus group reported the equal benefit of being able to be something other than their LGBTQ identity when online:

> Group 1: *"I think online games are good because you're completely different. There you have a character…and it's not so much about sexuality. Instead, you simply play and it's completely irrelevant who is homosexual and who isn't. "*

This was particularly important for this young person as they had experienced stigmatisation in their offline life, particularly at school, for being gay. However, by both tailoring his online identity in terms of his gaming avatar (character) and/or remaining anonymous online he can avoid the risk of others being prejudiced.

4.3.2.2 Tensions with Parents Over Control of the Online World

Given that young LGBTQ people clearly value the control that the online world gives them, it is unsurprising that many of the participants discussed interactions with their parents who were trying to influence and manage their online activity. Generally, participant discussions appeared to be quite dismissive of the attempts of their parents to be involved in their Internet use:

> Group 4: *"They have no power…My Dad tries to have control over me and my computer but he's not doing so well."*

> Group 3: *"My mum comes into my room thinking I don't see her...(I) turn around and see my mother like a condor…watching me and what I'm doing."*

This is perhaps due to their belief that compared to them, their parents lack knowledge and skills about the online world:

> Group 2: *"If it's a serious problem then you should talk to your parents, otherwise talk to someone competent in such things."*

> Group 1: *"These parents are, of course, of a totally different generation where there was no Internet yet and so they don't have any experience."*

However, young people wishing to retain control of their online world and, in particular, regulate who knows about their LGBTQ online identity, may also drive this dismissiveness.

It seems that parents are motivated to try and achieve some control due to concerns about their child's vulnerability and the risk of being exposed to inappropriate sexual material:

> Group 4: *"My parents always ask what I am doing online. Like where I am, what I do on Facebook and Cruiser… 'What are you doing online, I hope you're not on that porn?' (laughter from the group)"*

> Group 4: *"(Parents) would ask who you met: 'Are those people really your friends, do you really know all those or is it simply a load of dirty old men who are at it yadiyadiyada'."*

It is interesting that although participants were dismissive of parental concerns, they also spent a great deal of time discussing their own and

others experiences of being exposed to these exact risks, thus suggesting that their fears are legitimate. It appears that parents manage these tensions by retaining control of what they can, namely the logistical aspects of going online such as amount of time spent:

> Group 2: *"My mother gives me a really hard time when I'm on for too long."*
>
> Group 4: *"Mum shuts off the Internet when it's after half midnight otherwise I'll miss the bus the morning after."*

This perhaps allows parents to feel that they are being protective, at least in some sense, whilst also allowing the young person to retain their control over what they do online, although the effectiveness of these measures in safeguarding young people could be questioned. In contrast, one participant discussed her mother having almost complete control of her online world:

> Group 2: *"She checks everything… I can't post certain types of information about myself to please her."*

These contrasting parental approaches perhaps reflect differences in the general level of openness within the parent-child relationship and other developmental factors such as the child's age:

> Group 5: *"Today I tell my mother about 80% of information, this is the highest rate for my whole life. In the past, particularly so in the puberty period…I told her only 40% of information."*

4.3.2.3 Online environment facilitates control & confidence

Within three focus groups, aspects of the online environment that allowed the participants to maintain control over their online interactions were also discussed. Firstly, participants were very much in control of who they were in contact with online in terms of online friendships or when dealing with undesirable interactions from others:

> Group 3: *"I confirm them* (friend requests) *because I know them, have spoken with them…know I can share information with them…But, like right now, I have something like 63 friend requests from people I don't know…so I just reject them.*"

> Group 1: *"if you need to you can just click and get rid of the person."*

Furthermore, participants highlighted the increased control available during an online conversation compared to an offline one, which in turn increased their confidence:

> Group 5: *"For me it is a lot easier to be frank and open within this sort of mediated communication…because you have time to debate a matter in your mind without any haste, word it in a clear and comprehensible manner."*

> Group 3: *"Online you can say or do anything and you know that in any case you're behind a computer and not in front of a person so you're not even 'involved emotionally' and therefore you don't have any problems saying what you think."*

One participant also highlighted the benefit of meeting potential partners online due to being confident that they were of a known sexual orientation due to also being a member of a particular website:

> Group 1: *"On networks like that it's simply a lot easier to see if the person is really lesbian…I can't simply go up to a stranger and ask the person if they are lesbian."*

However, there may also be negative results of increased confidence online. One participant suggested that people are less bound by social rules online and therefore may behave negatively towards others:

> Group 1: *"There are also introvert people who suddenly get nasty and start bullying others…because they simply think…I don't have to look these people in the eye, I can simply tell them they are ****, without a reason."*

Overall, it appears that the control afforded by the online environment is extremely beneficial and facilitates young LGBTQ people's ability to explore different online relationships with increased confidence but also may result in reduced levels of investment in the relationship.

4.3.3 Seeking Connection

4.3.3.1 Sense of belonging

Across all focus groups, the primary reason for using the Internet appeared to be the sense of connection and belonging that it allowed the young people to develop and/or maintain with others, including other LGBTQ people. It became apparent that many of the participants struggled to find a sense of belonging within their offline life, particularly at the early stages of realising that they may be of an alternative sexual identity. However, the Internet in some way compensated for this:

Group 3: *"it's also good not to feel like you're alone."*

Group 4: *"When I was somewhere around 10-11 I found out there was something called homosexual and bisexual, and then I understood that I was myself…I denied it a lot until I couldn't cope any longer…and then I started to get in touch online with other people who maybe were in the same position as you"*

It allowed the participants to compare their experience with that of others, which they found very validating and supportive:

Group 3: *"On the Internet you can find other boys your own age with whom to compare experiences and talk and maybe with whom to build up each other's courage."*

Group 4: *"I lived in an area where homosexuality isn't normal…I felt really bad about it, like I wanted to kill myself. But then I got in touch with people outside and they hadn't come out to their parents…but to certain friends, so you could see a small future in that. As in you saw it could get better."*

There also seemed to be a sense of community gained within the online networks, one in which all members felt truly accepted, which may not have been their experience within their offline lives. This was particularly true for participants in Group 2 & 3 who were both creators and members of a local online group for LGBTQ young people:

Group 2: *"because of the particular path we have taken, we all have something in common."*

Group 3: *"for me it was my salvation…truly my source of freedom."*

As a result of this sense of connection with others and the validation of their sexual identity whilst online, some participants discussed building up their confidence to 'come out' to their wider social network:

> Group 3: *"…consequently I can talk completely normally, about how and what I feel…and so, then I began to talk normally, openly even with other people, slowly, slowly, I've gotten to the point of finally no longer hiding who I really am, after many years in which I had."*

4.3.3.2 Importance of offline social networks

Although participants clearly valued their online social networks and the support that they provide, there was also a theme across all five focus groups that participants placed a great deal of importance on transitioning their online connections to their offline worlds:

> Group 3: *"A friendship that starts on the Internet needs to turn into a real life friendship, or else it has no reason to exist."*

> Group 5: *"For me Internet friendship is either the beginning of real-life relations or their maintenance."*

Furthermore, participants within Groups 2 and 3 had such a drive to personally meet others whom they were in contact with online that they developed an offline LGBTQ social network for this purpose. This suggests that although the Internet provides the invaluable opportunity to meet other LGBTQ people, there is something more to be gained from face-to-face relationships and that the Internet cannot simply replace the sense of belonging, physical contact or intimacy missing from people's offline lives.

Some young people highlighted as a problem the lack of emotional connectedness when communicating online:

> Group 5: *"You do not see his/her face, eyes, you do not hear his/her voice, it is like communicating with a robot."*

This suggests that although participants may enjoy the sense of control and distance that the Internet provides (as discussed in section 4.3.2.3), there may come a point when this level of interaction is not fulfilling enough and a decision must be made whether to try and translate the relationship to an offline one:

> Group 5: *"I had been in contact with a person for 3 years. This winter I dropped everything and fled across half of Russia to Siberia to see her. Of course I was scared of possible disappointment, but she turned out to be even cooler than online. I was very happy that I did it."*

As a result, participants appeared to use the Internet as a stepping-stone to engaging in offline LGBTQ activities or developing offline friendships and relationships:

> Group 3: *"If I hadn't had the Internet, especially if my friend hadn't added me to this group* (the local LGBTQ group), *I wouldn't be here now."*

> Group 3: (Referring to Internet use) *"These were the experiences that brought me to meet other people…there would have been no other way to get to where I am now."*

Further support for this conclusion comes from a participant reporting that they no longer had a need to meet people online following the development of their offline social network:

Group 4: *"I like don't look online any longer for more contacts…since I already have you here."*

However, if the integration of online relationships with offline life is not possible, the Internet remained a valuable method to compensate:

Group 1: *"Well, if you come from a rural region like I do…it was better to be on a social network, for example…to get to know other gays. There really isn't a youth group there within 100 km."*

Group 5: *"I had to find the right girl but there was nobody in my environment…and so I resorted to the Internet. I found a girlfriend and many friends."*

Others highlighted that a webcam could also be used to overcome online communication barriers and developing confidence in the sincerity of the relationship until it is possible to meet in person:

Group 5: *"it is always nice to see live images of parents and friends…you can see them changing, expressing their mood."*

Group 1*: " I also met* (my boyfriend) *online…First, we wrote to each other…but you don't know if it's really the person or not. That's also why I'm the type that says, 'OK, let's use a webcam. Then I can see you directly which makes it easier for me to see what type of person you are and see if you really listed your real age. And then we met and more developed from it. So, I think that's easier to do over the Internet."*

4.3.4 Navigating Risk Online

4.3.4.1 Acceptance of Online Risk vs. Suspicion of Others

The normality of being exposed to risks on the Internet was apparent in four

of the focus groups. Participants discussed being regularly exposed to

sexualised content (including images) and being propositioned for sex,

mainly by individuals much older than themselves who may use fake

accounts to appear younger:

> Group 4: *"(He) then like started flirting with us and sent those pictures of his genitalia."*
>
> Group 4: *"There was this guy I'd chatted to…and we were going to meet…but then I got paranoid and asked a load of questions and then it turned out that it was a fake account, that it was an older man who had taken images from a blog."*
>
> Group 2: *"NETLOG is full of people talking about sex, asking you for pictures, it's based principally on that."*

One participant also highlighted the risk of cyberbullying online however this

was not widely discussed throughout the groups:

> Group 1: *"A bigger problem on the Internet is that bullying is also a lot easier."*

Interestingly, these experiences have not stopped these young LGBTQ

people using the Internet, which suggests that their need for a sense of

connection and belonging is deemed too important to forgo. As a result,

participants conveyed the impression that they were aware of and accepting

of these risks online, and that it was their responsibility to manage it

appropriately. However, it is likely that this reflects the views of participants who had been using the Internet for some time and have become habituated to taking steps to manage such experiences.

Participants also demonstrated that they had not become complacent regarding online risks and indicated a mistrust and suspicion of others online:

> Group 1: *"I simply don't know who's sitting at the other end. So, I don't know if he's really 19."*
>
> Group 5: *"Internet is a space where you can be anyone or anything you like, and no-one will blow your cover until he/she sees you in real life."*

It appears that this suspicion allowed participants to engage in the online world to meet their need of a sense of connection whilst also enabling them to screen for risky situations and keep themselves safe.

4.3.4.1 Firm Rules to Manage Risks with Confidence

Across the focus groups, participants had different opinions regarding ways in which you should keep yourself safe online. However, it was clear that participants had each developed ways and/or rules to abide by that they were personally comfortable with.

Some participants simply did not interact with those who they did not already know:

> Group 1: *"In my opinion one should only accept Facebook friend requests if you really personally know the person."*

However, for others the aim of their Internet communication was to expand their social network:

> Group 1: (Discussing whether to use your real name online) *"I don't really think that's really a problem. Especially in the case of Facebook and so on, that's where you want to be able to be found."*

Therefore, many based their acceptance of new online contacts on how much information was available regarding them:

> Group 2: *"I also decide on the basis of mutual friends and try to make an effort to check out their photos."*

> Group 4: *"You ask questions for like two months before you start flirting with that person and you know that you have a mobile number, checked the person out and checked if a friend knows the person."*

Participants also had strong views about how they themselves should behave online in order to reduce risk including the level of personal disclosure and content which they posted, particularly photos:

> Group 4: *"On Facebook I can post pictures but on like Cruiser* (an LGBTQ website) *it feels a bit difficult because…there may be like 50 year old men who sit copying pictures and add them to their computers."*

> Group 4: *"You can get the wrong reputation if you post a load of those semi-nude shots of yourself."*

> Group 1: *"You really have to watch what type of photos you post on the Internet…the first thing companies do today is look up your name on the Internet."*

However as noted by one participant, a person's online behaviour may be influenced by their mental state or underlying reason for using the Internet:

> Group 4: *"You feel lonely and want someone to be with and to have someone to love…then you go onto QX and every good-looking person you see you write something kind and like something happy."*

If participants were subjected to a risky situation online, they relied upon and seemed confident using technical skills available within the online environment to manage the situation:

> Group 4: *"block and report, block and report. That's like the first thing you learn."* (Participant 5)   *"It's a comfort."* (Participant 3)

> Group 2: *"I have a list of blocked contacts that's unreal. Like people who have created hate pages against me, I've blocked."*

Overall, participants had high confidence in the effectiveness of their risk management methods and felt safe on the Internet:

> Group 5: *"Generally, Internet poses no risks…you only have to know and apply safety measures. If you do not, you take risks."*

> Group 4: *"you're safer behind a screen than in reality."*

4.3.4.2 Offline Contacts Protect Against Online Risks

Although many of the participants seemed confident in their own ability to manage online risks, in four of the focus groups, there was also emphasis placed on the role of offline contacts too. Participants discussed groups of

friends learning from each other's experiences and sharing information to

keep each other safe:

> Group 4: *"you talk to friends about your own experiences and you take heed...you get more alert"*

> Group 4: *"if the same person is in touch with several friends then we'll sit and discuss what the person has said or tried to do."*

However, in order to gain this support from peers, it is likely that young

people would need to have disclosed their sexual identity:

> Group 4: *"if you haven't got a person who knows about it then it gets much more difficult. If you have someone who is like* (LGBTQ) *or knows you are then it's much easier."*

This is perhaps why many discussed receiving this support from other

members of the LGBTQ community group.

The role of parents was also mentioned with participants feeling that parents

had a responsibility to ensure their child was aware of online risks and to

respond in difficult or risky situations:

> Group 1: *"One should really tell kids about all this so that they know that the Internet is full of pitfalls…and that in any case is the job of the parents."*

> Group 5: *"I believe that this is a problem for parents to solve…they can buy special Internet access packages for children that block undesired content."*

However, of note, these suggestions regarding the parental role in Internet safety occurred in the context of participants discussing how to help other individuals, such as younger children, who participants referred to as "fragile and gullible" (Group 2) and "vulnerable" (Group 1) on the Internet. However, as discussed in section 4.3.2.2, many participants did not believe their parents held the skills necessary to provide this input, and therefore some participants felt they were better placed to provide this help to younger siblings:

> Group 1: *"And then you say, Mum, I can do this better than you. I know more about this than you do…I just seriously sat down with him* (younger sibling) *and told him about social networks."*

Overall, this suggests that it is important that young people get support to manage online risks from someone within their offline life and that it does not necessarily matter whom this person is, as long as they have the necessary skills and knowledge to do so.

4.4 Discussion

4.4.1 Findings

4.4.1.1. Opportunities of Internet Use

The current study found that participants appeared to benefit from many of the same opportunities as their non-LGBTQ peers, such as using the Internet as a source of entertainment and information, and as a mode of communication within their social network. However, in line with qualitative research conducted by Hillier et al. (2012), the young people also utilised the Internet in more unique ways in order to compensate for or overcome difficulties that they faced within their offline lives related to being LGBTQ.

In particular, the young people in this study discussed the advantages of the Internet when exploring matters related to their sexuality. Both their sexual identity development and expression appeared to be facilitated by the connection to other LGBTQ people online. Although the applicability of sexual identity development theories to the online world was not explicitly investigated during this study, the results suggest that the ecological model proposed by Alderman (2003) should be expanded to include the Internet as a distinct level within an individuals ecological system which influences this process. In fact, for some individuals, the online environment was the only aspect of their ecological system in which they were able to develop their sexual identity, essentially removing the need for this developmental process to occur offline. This finding suggests that the Internet should be viewed both

as an additional environment that facilitates sexual identity development, and as a distinct way for this process to occur. In particular, this applies to people for who it is too risky to have a LGBTQ sexual identity in their offline world but they are now able to do so exclusively online. Interestingly, if a stage model such as Cass (1979) was applied to this finding, a person with an online only LGBTQ identity would not be considered to have completed the final stage of 'identity synthesis' which is characterised by synthesised personal and public sexual identities, with support from their interpersonal environment, alongside sexual identity being seen as just one aspect of the self. Instead, D'Augelli's (1994) life span model is much more applicable owing to the proposal that there is not one final end stage of sexual identity development but rather each person has an individual journey and end point that can differ across environments/audiences.

Previous study findings have indicated that it is aspects of the online environment, such as anonymity and a sense of control, that play an important part in LGBTQ people being able to develop their sexual identity online with greater ease (Bamms et al., 2011; Craig & McInroy, 2014; DeHaan et al., 2013; Hacknel & Morris, 2014; Hillier et al., 2012; Pingel et al., 2012). The current study provides further support for this view and additional evidence regarding how this sense of control influences online behaviour i.e. having different online personas dependent on the audience to control who becomes aware of their emerging LGBTQ identity. This finding is also in line

with D'Augelli's (1994) life span model but demonstrates that even within one environment i.e. the online world, a person may demonstrate differing identities. This highlights the complexity of sexual identity development and makes it clear why the sense of control is so integral to LGBTQ young people benefitting from the Internet.

Following sexual identity development, the participants also highlighted the benefit of using the Internet for sexual identity expression with many discussing being able to express their sexuality more comfortably and confidently online, reflective of previous research in this area (Hillier & Harrison, 2007). This process also appeared to be facilitated by aspects of the online environment such as anonymity and, for those who struggle with face-to-face interactions, reduced need to understand non-verbal communication. This opportunity for more comfortable expression of sexuality was perhaps related to many participants discussing the use of the Internet to form both friendships with other LGBTQ individuals and romantic relationships. This finding is consistent with previous qualitative literature with this population (DeHaan et al., 2013; Hillier et al., 2012; Szulc & Dhoest, 2013). However, it was also very important to develop these online relationships to offline ones. Although this may suggest that online relationships are not a substitute for offline relationships and that there this something more to be gained from offline relationships, this finding should be interpreted with caution as participants were recruited from community

LGBTQ groups and therefore may be more likely to place importance on face to face social contact.

4.4.1.2 Risks of Internet Use

An overarching finding across the study was that young people were regularly required to navigate risk online in order to achieve the above benefits. Interestingly, the participants focused on the sexualised nature of LGBTQ websites, particularly being exposed to sexual conversations and images from people much older than themselves. This expands previous survey findings by Ybarra and Mitchell (2015) to suggest that it is not just those who are seeking relationships online but any LGBTQ young person using the Internet to, for example, seek support and belonging within a peer group, who are likely to be exposed to sexualised content online. Another interesting outcome was that the participants did not particularly acknowledge cyberbullying as a risk that they faced online, which is in contrast to previous literature that emphasises the heightened rate of cyberbullying faced by LGBTQ young people. This finding could be attributed to lower rates of cyberbullying in this specific sample or it may be suggestive of the fact that LGBTQ young people have developed resilience to these experiences and, as a result, focused on what they find more distressing or difficult to manage which is sexualised interactions with older individuals. Either way, it seems likely that sexualised behaviour from others may be more distressing to these young people as it is likely to directly impact on the

opportunities that the Internet provides to find genuine friendships and relationships.

Despite these experiences, it was evident that the majority of young people in this study felt confident and competent in managing the risks they faced. They exhibited skills and knowledge at a technical level, which allowed them to remove a perceived threat online, but also emphasised the role that their social network played in their resilience to online risks. The role that peers play in keeping each other safe is interesting as, to date, much of the literature has focused on the role that adults, in particular parents, play in safeguarding children on the Internet. Participants appeared to respect the views of their peers when it came to issues regarding risk, a direct contrast to their dismissiveness regarding parental concerns. This is likely to be due to fellow peers having a shared understanding of the online world and, in the case of LGBTQ peers, having awareness of the type of risks that they are likely to face online which may be different from non-LGBTQ peers. Furthermore, the young people also demonstrated proactive ways of managing risk online as highlighted by participants within the Italy focus groups creating their own private online community for LGBTQ young people in order to ensure they were able to reap the benefits of the online world in a safe way.

Interestingly, despite participants reporting feelings of confidence and resilience to online risk, they were also able to reflect on their previous

behaviour that put themselves at risk and times when they experienced

negative outcomes of risky situations online. The findings indicate that

participants may have been more vulnerable to harm when they initially

began going online and that they have developed their confidence managing

and resilience to online risks as they have gotten older and had the

opportunity to learn from their experiences. This is in line with the view

proposed by Livingstone and Palmer (2012) that online vulnerability needs to

be contextulised within the stage of a child or young person's development.

However, in addition, it is likely that other psychosocial factors, such as a

strong support network, will also have an influence on the development of

resilience.

4.4.1.3 The Balancing Act: Opportunities vs. Risk

The findings of the current study show that young LGBTQ people are

continually managing the balance between opportunity and risk online.

Although this finding is likely to apply to all children and young people, it

appears be even more pertinent to LGBTQ young people given the specific

opportunities that the Internet affords them. For example, the majority of the

participants discussed the benefit of the Internet in relation to their sexual

identity development and expression and therefore it is perhaps unsurprising

that being exposed to unwanted sexualised content or unwanted contact

from others is the main risk that they report. Interestingly, the degree to

which the participants felt at risk from similar experiences seemed to vary

across individuals however each person appeared to have developed a

balance of opportunity and risk which they were personally comfortable with and able to manage. It seems likely that overtime many of the young people had developed enough resilience and ability to manage online risks, in their view, effectively, which was particularly important for them due to their desire to use the Internet as part of their sexual identity development. However, many participants stated that their parents were still of the view that they needed to be protected, which resulted in the battle for control that many young people reported. Unfortunately, although the LGBTQ young people strive to be completely in control of their online world and keep this aspect of their life private from others for good reason, it is also likely to make them more vulnerable to harm online as they are not receiving any support to manage the risks they face, something that was highlighted as particularly important by the young people themselves. This is likely to be most acute at the early stage of LGBTQ young people's Internet use when they have relatively little experience of managing risky situations and they have not developed a LGBTQ support network with whom they can be open about their online experiences.

4.4.2 Implications

The above findings highlight areas in which practical steps could be taken to help balance the risks and opportunities presented by the Internet. Firstly, adult education regarding young people's Internet use seems particularly important, as only then will they be able to provide the support that their children need. Although there have been attempts to make information

accessible to parents by organisations such as EU Kids Online and the Young Mind's Charity, there is still a reliance upon parents being able to recognise that they may not have as much online expertise as their child and that they may need to alter their usual parenting style from protecting to enabling their child in order to support safe Internet use. Therefore, information for parents needs to be made more widely available.

There is also a role for schools to support the development of Internet safety skills in all pupils. Many participants stated that they learnt to keep themselves safe by sharing experiences with their peers and therefore teachers could use a similar format of class discussion or interactive tasks as a way to engage them in this process. Given that the ability to keep safe online is linked to developmental factors (Young Minds Charity, 2016) it is important that education and skills based learning is provided throughout a child's development from an early age.

A key issue specifically related to the LGBTQ population is the lack of age appropriate resources to explore sexuality and meet other LGBTQ people. Participants within the Italy focus groups had the initiative to create such a resource, which was highly valued by its members. This suggests that it would be beneficial for established offline resources such as LGBTQ community groups to increase their online presence in order to provide more appropriate online environments for these young people. It would be vital to include young LGBTQ people in the development of such a resource to

ensure that it provides what they need from an online environment. Furthermore, being involved in the creation and maintenance of such a resource could empower the young people as well as helping those who are in need of support and information from their peers. It would also be beneficial for adults that are already involved in running the offline community groups to have a monitoring role to help ensure online safety or provide any extra assistance. However, it is recognised that this would require a great deal of investment from contributors and relies upon people having the necessary skills and knowledge to run such a resource.

4.4.3 Strengths & Limitations

To date, this is one of the few studies that have examined LGBTQ young people's view of the Internet. What makes this project unique is that the focus group interview protocol was designed to talk to a wide range of different populations of young people about their Internet use. Although it could be argued that this resulted in less specific questions that might be relevant to LGBTQ young people, it in turn allowed the interviewers to be more open in their questioning and unbiased by topics covered in previous research. Therefore, all themes within this paper relating to LGBTQ specific issues were generated from the participants themselves rather than being a product of the questions that were asked.

Something that could be deemed both a strength and limitation of this study is the use of secondary analysis. In recent times, researchers have begun to

recognise the value of secondary data analysis (Corti & Thompson, 2012).

By conducting a secondary analysis on this data set, specific insights into

LGBTQ young people's lives emerged from the data which were not captured

when it was previously analysed as part of a larger dataset. It is important

and ethical to ensure that data gathered within research is used to its full

potential and, in the context of this study, it was felt that the data provided a

rich insight into this population therefore it would not have been warranted to

collect further data.

It is recognised that there are also limitations present when conducting a

secondary analysis. The only data available for the current study was the

archived transcriptions and therefore there is a risk that a secondary analysis

could either miss out or misinterpret important information due to a lack of

context. The principal researcher overcame this difficulty by ensuring

familiarity with the data before the analysis process began and discussing

thoughts about the dataset with the second author who was part of the

original research team. Secondly, as discussed by Corti & Thompson (2012),

the process of transcription can also vary between researchers and within

this study the process of transcription was further complicated by the need to

translate the data into English. As a result, there may have been differences

in the way concepts are described and/ or nuances within the data that were

more difficult to recognise and interpret accurately.

A final potential limitation of the current study is the heterogeneity of the participants in terms of their nationality. Within the data, cultural differences were noted between focus groups. In particular, it was clear that participants within the Russia focus group did not have such a focus on exploring their sexuality online in comparison to participants within other focus groups. These differences perhaps reflect cultural norms and values of the countries included in the study, with Russia likely to be the least tolerant of LGBTQ issues. Although this does create heterogeneity within the data set, it also is a means for useful reflection about the experience of Internet use for young LGBTQ people across Europe, highlighting the many similarities for all the participants and some differences.

4.4.4 Future Research

The findings from the current study suggest a number of future research areas. Firstly, it would be beneficial to explore the applicability of different models of sexual identity development to the LGBTQ people's online world in more detail. In particular, it would be useful to focus on the opportunities and risks faced online for transgender young people as they may have differing identity development processes to those discussed in this article. Secondly, it would be useful to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that mediate the process of developing resilience or experiencing harm for LGBTQ people online. Specifically, factors such as where they are in the process of sexual identity development and degree of contact with a LGBTQ support network

would be beneficial to explore as these were indicated as potentially influential factors within the current study.

4.4.5 Conclusion

The aims of the current study were to investigate how LGBTQ young people use the Internet, how they communicate online and the impact on their lives, as well as exploring the risks that they are exposed to and how they stay safe online. The findings showed that young LGBTQ people benefit from the Internet in both similar ways to non-LGBTQ peers and in more population specific ways, such as sexual identity development and connecting with other LGBTQ people, which allowed them to overcome or compensate for barriers faced within their offline lives. Unfortunately, the participants also reported a number of risks online, namely the exposure to sexualised behaviour or unwanted contact from older people. However, positively, the LGBTQ young people clearly demonstrated resilience and confidence in managing these risks due to both learning from experience and help from their support network. Overall, the findings highlight that given the right individual, environmental and social circumstances LGBTQ young people are able to develop the skills and resilience to effectively manage online risks in order for them to benefit from population specific opportunities that the Internet provides.

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Table of Appendices

Appendix A: Author guidelines for submission to Computers in Human Behavior

GUIDE FOR AUTHORS

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We now differentiate between the requirements for new and revised submissions. You may choose to submit your manuscript as a single Word or PDF file to be used in the refereeing process. Only when your paper is at the revision stage, will you be requested to put your paper in to a 'correct format' for acceptance and provide the items required for the publication of your article.

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INTRODUCTION

Computers in Human Behavior is a scholarly journal dedicated to examining the use of computers from a psychological perspective. Original theoretical works, research reports, literature reviews, software reviews, book reviews and announcements are published. The journal addresses both the use of computers in psychology, psychiatry and related disciplines as well as the psychological impact of computer use on individuals, groups and society. The former category includes articles exploring the use of computers for professional practice, training, research and theory development. The latter category includes articles dealing with the psychological effects of computers on phenomena such as human development, learning, cognition, personality, and social interactions. The journal addresses human interactions with computers, not computers per se. The computer is discussed only as a medium through which human behaviors are shaped and expressed. The primary message of most articles involves information about human behavior. Therefore, professionals with an interest in the psychological aspects of computer use, but with limited knowledge of computers, will find this journal of interest.

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Results should be clear and concise.

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This should explore the significance of the results of the work, not repeat them. A combined Results and Discussion section is often appropriate. Avoid extensive citations and discussion of published literature.

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The main conclusions of the study may be presented in a short Conclusions section, which may stand alone or form a subsection of a Discussion or Results and Discussion section.

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If there is more than one appendix, they should be identified as A, B, etc. Formulae and equations in appendices should be given separate numbering: Eq. (A.1), Eq. (A.2), etc.; in a subsequent appendix, Eq. (B.1) and so on. Similarly for tables and figures: Table A.1; Fig. A.1, etc.

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Appendix B: Systematic Review Quality Appraisal Questions

Area	Quality Indicators
Theoretical Framework	What theoretical framework guides or informs the study? In what way is this framework reflected in the study design? How do authors locate the study within the existing knowledge base?
Research Design	Is there a clear statement of the study aims? Is the research design appropriate for the aims of the study? Has the researcher justified this?
Sample	How was the sample selected? Is the sample appropriate for the study aims? Reasons for non-participation discussed if relevant.
Data Collection	Is the setting of data collection justified? Method of data collection clear? E.g. focus group, interview & inclusion of field notes and how they were used. Have the methods been justified? Methods modified during the study? If so, why? What role does the researcher adopt? **(Context criterion)**
Data Analysis	Description of analysis process (level of transparency). Adequate evidence to support the analysis? E.g. raw data extracts, evidence of iterative analysis,

	efforts to establish validity e.g. negative evidence, use of multiple sources, data triangulation. **(Believability criterion)**
	To what extent are contradictory data taken into account?
Findings	Are findings explicit & discussed in relation to study aims?
	Are findings supported by sufficient evidence (can see how conclusions were made)?
	Contradictory data considered?
	Credibility of findings? E.g. triangulation, respondent validation, more than one analyst.
Context	See data collection
Evaluation/Outcome	Is the conclusion justified given the conduct of the study?
Impact of Investigator	Are the researchers own position, assumptions and possible biases discussed? (How they could affect the study, in particular, analysis and interpretation of the data).
Believability	See data analysis
Ethics	Were ethical issues considered? E.g. informed consent, confidentiality & impact of study on participants.
	Approval from ethics committee?
Value & Implications of Research	What is the contribution of the study to exiting knowledge or understanding?
	Acknowledgement of limitations in contribution & new areas of research necessary?
	Applicability of findings to wider population/ other settings/ how findings can be used?

Appendix C: Empirical Paper

C.1 Ethical Approval Letter

Ailie Clark
Trainee Clinical Psychologist
School of Health in Social Science
University of Edinburgh
Medical School, Teviot Place
Edinburgh
EH3 5EP

15 April 2016

Dear Ailie,

Application for Level 1 Ethical Approval

Reference: CLIN269
Project Title: Young LGBTQ People and the Internet: A Secondary Analysis of Focus Group
Data
Academic Supervisor(s):   Emily Newman / Ethel Quayle

Thank you for submitting the above research project for review by the Department of Clinical and Health Psychology Ethics Research Panel. I can confirm that the submission has been independently reviewed and was approved on the 13th April 2016.

Should there be any change to the research protocol it is important that you alert us to this as this may necessitate further review.

Yours sincerely,

Kirsty Gardner

Administrator
Clinical Psychology

C.2 Focus Group Interview Protocol

FOCUS GROUP PROMPTS

According to the three main areas of analysis; technology, impact and staying safe, we suggest the following set of prompts. These prompts are to be used to facilitate the discussion and you need not ensure that each question is answered.

1. Tell me about your use of the Internet:

*   *How much time do you usually spend online every day?*

*   *Tell me about what you usually do online.*

*   *Do you get imposed any rules or restrictions using the Internet (by your parents, tutors...)?*

2. Tell me about the social networking groups you belong to (Facebook, Myspace...):

*   *How did you decide what to include in your profile and settings you use?*
*   *With whom do you share this information?*
*   *Approximately how many 'friends' do you have on your social networking site(s)?*
*   *Who are your online friends? (friends, friends of friends, strangers, teachers, family…).*
*   *What kind of contents do you share?(music, experiences from everyday life, pictures on holiday, when you are drunk, sexy pictures…).*

3. Tell me about your views and habits using your webcam.

4. Tell me what "stay safe online" means to you:

*   *Tell me about methods you use to stay safe online*
*   *Tell me about things you would not do on the Internet*

- *If you had a younger brother/sister, is there anything you would suggest him/her to pay special attention to on the Internet?*

5. Tell me about the differences you think there are between online and offline relationships.

6. What do you usually talk about online with your friends?

7. Tell me about your experiences of meeting new people online:
- *Are there positive aspects/ pros?*
- *Are there negative aspects/cons?*
- *How do you get introduced to a new person online?*
- *What do you usually talk about with people you only know online?*
- *Does it make difference, if you communicate with a male or female (topics you choose, how you speak about yourself…)?*
- *Tell me about your experiences in talking about sex on line.*
- *Have you ever met someone offline that you had previously only talked to online?*
  - *Could you tell me an example taken from your own or your friends' experience?*
  - *Tell me about how the online relationship developed.*
  - *How did you/your friends feel?*
  - *How did you/your friends react?*

8. Tell me if you or your friends believe that online interaction may at times be dangerous.

9. Tell me about young people you believe to be more likely to end up in unpleasant online situations. (sex, age, ethnic group…):
- *What might make some young people more vulnerable to sexual abuse risks than others?*

10. If anything unpleasant happens on line what would you suggest to do?

C.3 Theoretical Framework

<u>Original Theoretical Framework from Swedish Focus Group</u>

1. Being online is a part of everyday life
   o Being online to fit in
   o Seen as an important part of their personal life

2. In control of their online world
   o Parents do not influence/ are outsiders of their online world
   o Tailoring online identity dependent on audience

3. Connecting to other LGBTQ people online
   o Sense of belonging
   o Gaining support from others experiences
   o Exploring sexual identity
   o Compensate for lack of LGBTQ offline network

4. Importance of offline social networks
   o Keep each other safe on the Internet
   o Value in LGBTQ community group
   o Offline network preferred to online network
   o Barriers between self and offline network if haven't come out

5. High awareness of risks online
   o Awareness gained from experiences of self and others
   o Regularly exposed to risks e.g. sexualised behaviour from older people
   o Suspicious of how genuine new online contacts are until their identity has been proven
   o Trust established with online contacts over time
   o Awareness of how their own behaviour online influences risk

6. Confidence in ability to manage online risks
   o High use of technical skills
   o Easier to manage risks online compared to offline

Final Theoretical Framework from all focus groups

1. Digital World As Part of Daily Life
2. In Control of Their Online World
   o Ability to tailor online identity
   o Tensions with parents over control of the online world
   o Online environment facilitates control & confidence
3. Seeking Connection
   o Sense of belonging
   o Importance of offline social networks
4. Navigating Risk
   o Acceptance of risks by young people
   o Firm rules to manage risk with confidence
   o Offline contacts protect against Internet risks

C. 4 Example of Analysis Process

dedoose
Great Research Made Easy

SocioCultural Research Consultants, LLC

LGBT Project | Account | Logout

Home | Codes | Media | Excerpts | Descriptors | Analyze | Memos | Training | Security | Data Set | Back | Projects

Document: Sweden 24 Nov 2011.docx

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☐ Line #'s ☑ Memos ☐ RTL

P8: That they like can't get you to go to bed at the time you're supposed to go to bed. That's why they find the information saying that it can be dangerous. That can happen if you do that and stuff.

Lars: Does it also happen at anyone's home that they discuss where you are online? Which sites you use, which groups you are members of?

P1: Yes.

P4: Yes.

M. My parents always ask what I'm doing online. Like where I am, what I do on *facebook* and *cruiser*.

Lars: Your parents? Your parents ask you that?

P1: Yes, all the time. "What are you doing online, I hope you're not on that porn?"

(Laughter)

P7: Before when it was *Playahead* all the time, then one would ask who you met: "Are those people really your friends, do you really know all those or is it simply a load of dirty old men who are at it yadiyadiyada ..."

P4: (Mimics) You are careful, I hope?

P8: Yeah, right?

P4: Stuff like not to meet anyone without a friend.

P8: Yes.

P7: Yes. As in you can't meet anyone without a friend. They are on like *Playahead* of like two years ago, a year and a half ago.

P5: We have sort of talked about that .... I was the only one who did not have *Playahead*, I was totally bullied about it.

P7: I was like on *Playahead* shitloads.

Lars: It felt like you all could identify with that, that discussion? The sites you're on and that. What do you yourselves think? Are there some sites you don't want to be on?

All: Yes, mm.

P5: Yes, you warn others.

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Selection Info

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In control of their...
Tensions with pa...

Codes

Being online is part of everyday life

In control of their online world

Connecting to others online

Importance of offline social networks

High awareness of risks online

Confidence in ability to manage online risks

Appendix D: Thesis References

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