The Gender and Sexually-Focused Bullying Experiences of Adolescent Females in Secondary School

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Abstract

Bullying based on actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender presentation is a serious problem in North American schools that has been related to negative psychological and academic consequences for youth (e.g., Taylor & Peter, 2011). While it is clear that bullying based on actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender presentation has damaging psychological and academic consequences on youth in general (e.g., Graham & Bellmore, 2007), little is known about how girls specifically experience and are affected by this form of aggression. Therefore, this qualitatively study examined the meaning that young women made of their lived experiences with bullying that was gender or sexually-focused during secondary school. Participants were 13 women aged 18-24 who identified as lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual, and who experienced gender and sexually-focused bullying between grades 7 and 12. This study was conducted employing a feminist social constructionist framework and a phenomenological method. Semi-structured interviews with the participants were transcribed, and then analyzed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis. The results show that gender and sexually-focused bullying takes various forms and focuses on: (a) gender norms for appearance and behavior, (b) sexual orientation, and (c) dating and sexual activity. Additionally, young women use multiple strategies to cope with gender and sexually-focused bullying, and it negatively influences their academic and psychosocial functioning both during secondary school and after. Discourses emerged within the participants' accounts showing that gender and sexually-focused bullying is perpetuated by rigid societal expectations for the gendered behavior of females. Implications for research and practice are offered.

Keywords: bullying, gender; sexuality; adolescence, girls

Résumé

L'intimidation basée sur l'orientation sexuelle réelle ou perçue ainsi que sur le genre supposé a des répercussions négatives psychologiques et académiques sur les jeunes (Taylor & Peter, 2011), et demeure un problème sérieux dans les écoles Nord-américaines. Alors qu'il est clair que l'intimidation a des répercussions dommageables aux niveaux psychologique et académique pour les jeunes en général (Graham & Bellmore, 2007), on en sait très peu sur les répercussions qu'éprouvent les filles spécifiquement par cette forme d'agression. Cette étude qualitative a examiné la signification que les jeunes femmes ont donnée à leurs expériences vécues avec l'intimidation pendant leurs études effectuées à l'école secondaire. Les participantes étaient 13 femmes âgées de 18-24 ans qui s'identifient comme lesbienne, bisexuelle ou hétérosexuelle et qui ont éprouvé de l'intimidation basée sur leurs genres, ou leur orientation sexuelle, entre la 7ieme et 12ieme année du secondaire. Cette étude a été realisé dans le cadre d'une approche socioconstructivisme féministe et phénoménologique. Des entrevues semi-structureés ont été transcrits et ensuite analysés utilisant l'Analyse interpretative phénoménologique (IPA). Les résultats indiquent que l'intimidation se manifeste de façons diverses et comprend plusieurs facteurs: (a) les normes de genre pour l'apparence et le comportement, (b) l'orientation sexuelle et (c) fréquentations et activité sexuelle. De plus, les jeunes femmes utilisent de diverses stratégies pour faire face à l'intimidation et ceci a un impacte négatif sur leur fonctionnement psychosocial et académique pendant le secondaire et après. Les comptes rendus des participantes démontrent que l'intimidation est perpétuée par les attentes sociétales rigides pour le comportement des femmes. Des implications pour la recherche et la pratique sont proposées.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background

Bullying has been recognized as a significant problem affecting the health and wellbeing of adolescents in North America and around the world (e.g., Craig et al., 2009; Kessel-Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve, & Coutlter, 2012). Bullying has predominantly been defined by these criteria: (a) repeated behavior; (b) intent to harm; (c) occurs over time; (d) physical or psychological imbalance of power, and (e) victims cannot easily defend themselves (e.g., Olweus, 1993). Bullying among adolescents can take a variety of forms including physical, verbal, relational, or cyber, and sexual or gendered harassment (e.g., McGrath, 2007; Meyer, 2009; Shariff, 2008).

Additionally, research has shown that bullying behaviors change as girls and boys enter adolescence, which is related to development in their cognitive and emotional capacities, and to changes associated with puberty. Specifically, relational and verbal bullying, which requires more sophisticated thought processes, becomes more common and bullying also takes on a greater sexual focus as youth begin puberty (e.g., Craig & Pepler, 2003).

Research examining males and females together as a group has shown that bullied adolescents are likely to experience negative psychological and academic consequences such as, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress, low self-esteem, school absenteeism, and poor academic achievement (e.g., Beale, 2001; Graham & Bellmore, 2007; Houbre, Tarquino, Thuillier, & Hergott, 2006; Nishina et al., 2005). With regard to the effects of bullying on girls in particular, it has been shown that girls are more likely than boys to feel vulnerable to multiple forms of bullying (May & Dunaway, 2000 as cited in Dao et al., 2006), and girls also demonstrate more distressed reactions to relational bullying than boys (Crick, Grotpeter, &

Bigbee, 2002; Goldstein & Tisak, 2004; Merrell, Buchanan, & Tran, 2006; Paquette & Underwood, 1999). Thus, girls are sensitive to the influence of bullying and may show distinct reactions to certain types of bullying.

Another form of aggression that is prevalent among adolescents is homophobic bullying, defined as, "any form of physical (e.g., hitting or kicking), relational (e.g., spreading rumors or teasing), or social (e.g., being ignored) aggression perpetrated against an individual because of his or her actual or perceived sexual orientation, or because the individual's behavior is not typical of his or her sex" (Rivers, Duncan, & Besag, 2007). Homophobic bullying seems to be a product of societal homophobia and heterosexism in North America, as negative attitudes toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) individuals continue to be prevalent (Horrowitz, 2013).

Given the widespread nature of anti-LGBTQ sentiments in North America, it is not surprising that homophobic bullying is rampant in Canadian and American secondary schools. For example, Egale Canada's National Survey of Homophobia in Canadian High Schools revealed that LGBTQ students and students with LGBTQ parents experienced much higher levels of verbal and physical abuse than other students (Taylor & Peter, 2011). National surveys of the experience LGBTQ youth in U.S. schools have revealed similarly disconcerting results (e.g., Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak, 2008). Thus, evidence undeniably demonstrates that LGBTQ adolescents are frequently targeted with homophobic bullying in their schools.

Sex differences in homophobic bullying have been identified. Although both boys and girls perpetrate homophobic bullying (Poteat & Espelage, 2005; Poteat & Rivers, 2010; Rivers et al., 2007), boys are more likely than girls to employ and be targeted with homophobic epithets in their daily lives and in bullying scenarios (Poteat & Espelage, 2005; Poteat & Rivers, 2010). In

contrast, girls' usage of homophobic epithets tends to be more isolated to bullying events (Poteat & Rivers, 2010). Thus, sex differences are evident in the perpetration of homophobic bullying. Still, most studies investigating the bullying experiences of sexual minority youth have examined LGBTQ individuals as one category. Consequently, any differences between individuals in terms of homophobic bullying perpetration and victimization based on their sex or sexual orientation have been concealed.

Being targeted with bullying due to one's sexual orientation or gender expression can result in a myriad of negative outcomes including: depression (e.g., Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, & Koenig, 2008; Rivers, 2004;), anxiety (Rivers, 2006), PTSD **(**D'Augelli et al., 2006; Rivers, 2004), suicidal thoughts and attempts (e.g.,Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002; Espelage et al., 2008), and increased substance use (Rivers & Noret, 2008). Homophobic bullying has also been found to be associated with decreases in school performance, frequent school absences, and school dropout (Bochenek & Brown, 2001; Dupper & Meyer-Adams, 2002; Rivers, 2004).

Although the damaging effects of homophobic bullying on LGBTQ youth as a group are clear, the distinct effects of this form of aggression on male and female youth of differing sexual orientations is not well understood. While a number of studies have discussed the influence of homophobic bullying on boys, there is a notable lack of studies examining the consequences of such violence on female secondary school students, whether heterosexual, lesbian, or bisexual. The small amount of literature that is available has demonstrated that experiencing verbal homophobic bullying is related to social withdrawal in heterosexual girls (Poteat & Espelage, 2007). It has also been shown that harassment among girls is often sexually-focused (e.g., use of the words"slut", "whore"), and that "lesbian" has been used as an insult (Duncan, 1999). Thus, the extant literature suggests that verbal homophobic bullying is detrimental to girls.

Paralleling the research focus on homophobic bullying of boys, theorizations about the root causes of homophobic bullying have also been male-focused. Homophobic bullying has been conceptualized as stemming from rigid societal gender norms, but the social construction of masculinity has been most highlighted. That is, in North American society, it is expected that men exhibit traditionally masculine traits and that women demonstrate traditionally feminine traits, but masculine traits are more highly valued. That is, boys who do not epitomize dominant masculinity are considered feminine and tend to be bullied (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003). It has also been posited that students uphold stereotypical gender norms by bullying peers who stray from conventional sexual and gender standards. Additionally, research shows that one reason boys engage in homophobic bullying is to prove their masculinity and to gain social dominance (Phoenix et al., 2003). Scholars have also discussed the extreme shame that heterosexual males may feel due to being bullied in a way that calls into question their heterosexuality and masculinity, and that this may fuel retaliatory violence on the part of such adolescent males (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003). Thus, whereas the relationship between the homophobic bullying of boys and dominant notions of masculinity has been discussed a great deal, girls have remained largely unaccounted for within these theorizations.

Research Rationale and Purpose

Homophobic bullying is a significant problem facing youth in secondary schools, yet girls' experiences of homophobic bullying, and the sociocultural issues that underlay this phenomenon have barely been explored. That is, despite the fact that girls' involvement in homophobic bullying has been substantiated (Poteat & Rivers, 2010), and girls clearly demonstrate negative reactions to certain forms of general bullying (Cullerton-Sen & Crick, 2005), much remains to be learned about how heterosexual, bisexual, lesbian young women are

affected by bullying that is focused on their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender presentation.. In order to safeguard young females from the threat of homophobic bullying, it is necessary to understand how they uniquely experience and cope with this phenomenon.

For the purpose of this study, the term "gender and sexually-focused bullying" was used in place of "homophobic bullying" because it is more inclusive of the diverse ways in which people experience this form of violence. Thus, the aim of this study is to investigate young women's experiences of gender and sexually-focused bullying in secondary school.

Research Questions

This study posed the following questions: (a) How do young women construct their lived experiences with gender and sexually-focused bullying as adolescents? (b) How do young women perceive the influence of experiencing gender and sexually-focused bullying during their adolescence? (c) What meaning do young women derive from their experiences with gender and sexually-focused bullying as adolescents? (d) What do young women perceive are the needs of female, adolescent victims of gender and sexually-focused bullying?

Epistemology

In carrying out this study, a feminist social constructionist epistemology was utilized. Certain assumptions are central to feminist social constructionism (FSC), including the notions that multiple social realities exist, that knowledge is co-constructed, that oppression is real, and that gender is a performative action (Sprague, 2005). The underlying principles of FSC epistemology are fitting for an investigation of the gender and sexually-focused bullying experience of females in secondary school. Paralleling FSC's focus on the co-construction of knowledge, gender and sexually-focused bullying is a fundamentally co-constructed process involving interactions between victims, bullies, and the many others, all of whom play a role in

how this phenomenon is experienced and understood. Also, the assumption of multiple realities allows girls' gender and sexually-focused bullying experiences, which have remained invisible, to be recognized as unique and worthwhile contributions to the extant bullying research.

The feminist social constructionist conceptualization of gender as a verb and its anti-oppressive stance are also conducive to an examination of girls' experiences of gender and sexually-focused. That is, FSC illuminates the relationship between gender and sexually-focused bullying and the social construction of gender, in that failure to enact socially prescribed gendered behaviours makes one vulnerable to bullying. Likewise, with its anti-oppressive position, FSC uncovers hidden assumptions related to gender and sexuality that marginalize young, female victims of gender and sexually-focused bullying. In sum, feminist social constructionist epistemology facilitates the study of the gender and sexually-focused bullying of girls by questioning dominant ways of knowing and shedding light on perspectives that have been suppressed. By drawing attention to viewpoints that have been marginalized, FSC can serve as a vehicle for social change.

Methodology

A qualitative research design was selected to examine the gender and sexually-focused bullying experiences of adolescent females, as qualitative methods are conducive to investigating people's lived experiences and the resultant meanings constructed from them (Polkinghorne, 2005). Hermeneutic Phenomenology was utilized to elucidate adolescent females' distinctive and multifaceted gender and sexually-focused bullying experiences. Hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry allows researchers to obtain in-depth accounts of people's experiences of a specific phenomenon that may be taken for granted. In so doing, a hermeneutic phenomenological method allows greater understandings of particular experiences to be attained

(Creswell, 2007). Data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). IPA, which aims to explore how individuals make meaning of experiences within their specific life contexts (Smith & Osborn, 2008), facilitated an analysis of how the participants experienced gender and sexually-focused bullying in their schools, and how their understanding of the victimization was influenced by their broader surroundings.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized as follows: Chapter Two reviews the existing literature on bullying and homophobic bullying, and its strengths and limitations. Then, the aims of the current study and the research questions are presented. Chapter Three begins by discussing the epistemology and methodology employed in this study, namely Feminist Social Constructionism and Hermeneutic Phenomenology. The latter half of Chapter Three explains the analytic method utilized, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, and reviews the research procedures carried out. In Chapter Four, the results gleaned from the study are revealed. The results section is organized based on the topic areas emphasized in the participants' accounts of bullying: (a) the climate of their secondary schools, (b) their experiences of gender and sexually-focused bullying, (c) their immediate responses to the bullying, (d) the influence of the bullying on their school experiences, (e) the psychosocial effects of the bullying, (f) the influence of the bullying on their values and understanding of society, and (g) how they coped with the bullying. In Chapter Five, the findings of a discourse analysis of the results are discussed. Additionally, the main findings of this study are reviewed and are examined in relation to the extant literature and the epistemological framework of the study. Chapter Five closes with a review of this study's unique scholarly contributions, the implications of these contributions to the practice of counselling, and the strengths and limitations of the study overall.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Adolescence has long been identified as a critical period in the human lifespan, a time of developmental milestones that include, exploring and gaining a sense of one's own identity, forging and maintaining close ties with others, and negotiating the academic demands of educational institutions (Field, Hoffman, & Posch, 1997; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Among these developmental tasks, sustaining close relationships is identified as a basic psychological need of adolescents (Ryan & Deci, 2008). In fact peer relationships have been found to be of crucial importance to adolescents (Wentzel, Baker, & Russell, 2009), and positive peer experiences have been associated with higher self-esteem and greater school engagement (Wentzel, 2005). Conversely, struggling with difficult peer relationships and experiencing rejection from peers during adolescence has been related to adjustment problems such as depression and social withdrawal, as well as behavioural problems (Deater-Deckard, 2001; Herrenkohl, Catalano, Hemphill, & Toumbourou, 2009). For many youth, bullying stands out as the source of such relational problems.

Bullying is a leading adolescent health concern in several countries around the world and is said to affect millions of students (Craig et al., 2009; Espelage & Swearer, 2004). Research on the topic of bullying came to the fore in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Harris & Petrie, 2003) and concern with this topic is growing (Berger, 2007). The considerable attention that bullying has garnered from researchers mirrors its pervasiveness. The prevalence of bullying is so high that it has been referred to as the most common type of school violence (Kim, Koh, & Leventhal, 2005; Macklem, 2003). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2009), 24 percent of public schools in the United States reported that student bullying was a daily or

weekly problem during the 2005-2006 school year. Additionally, in the 2008-2009 school year, 32% or 7,066,000 American students between the ages of 12 to 18 reported being bullied at school (U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2010). Bullying is also a major Canadian public health concern (Ateah & Cohen, 2009). In a World Health Organization study, Canada was ranked 26th and 27th out of 35 countries, indicating a high prevalence of youth engaging in bullying and being victimized by bullying (Craig & Harel-Fisch, 2004). The prevalence of bullying in Canada and around the world is of grave concern, given its association with numerous negative social and psychological consequences for victims (Graham & Bellmore, 2007; Nishina, Juvonen, & Witkow, 2005). In light of the rampant nature of bullying and the negative consequences that it can engender for youth, this phenomenon needs to be understood in all of its complexity.

Defining Bullying

Over the past 40 years, many definitions of bullying have been put forward. Bullying tends to be defined by these criteria: (a) repeated behavior, (b) intent to harm, (c) occurs over time, (d) physical or psychological imbalance of power, and (e) victims cannot easily defend themselves (e.g., Nansel, et al., 2001; Olweus, 1993). Following these criteria, bullying can be direct or indirect. Direct bullying is openly confrontational and involves physical and verbal aggression delivered directly to the victim by the perpetrator(s), while indirect bullying is meant to cause psychological harm circuitously through gossip, spreading rumors, and ignoring or excluding others from social groups (Dukes, Stein, & Zane, 2010; van der Wal, de Wit, & Hirasing, 2003). Additionally, bullying can take various forms: physical, verbal, relational, or cyber, and in some cases, sexual or gendered harassment (McGrath, 2007; Meyer, 2009; Shariff, 2008). Although the various types of bullying that have been identified in the literature overlap

in subtle ways, they are conceptualized as distinct because they have important differences. These differences require further clarification within this discussion.

To begin, *physical bullying* can be defined as harm to another person through aggressive acts (McGrath, 2007; Woods & Wolke, 2004). A form of direct bullying, physical bullying can involve hitting, kicking, or using weapons with intention to cause harm (Shariff, 2008). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2008), 32% of American Students aged 12-18 reported being bullied at school during the 2007 school year (e.g. being made fun of, gossiped about, pushed or shoved, or forced into doing something). Additionally, rates of physical bullying are similar among adolescents in the United States and Canada (Pickett, Ianotti, Simons-Morton, & Dostaler, 2009). While physical bullying is arguably the most overt and extreme type of bullying, the threat posed by other forms of bullying should not be discounted. One such type of bullying is *verbal bullying*, which involves the frequent use of derogatory remarks or names, as well as threats of harm (Berger, 2007). Studies in North America, Europe, and Israel have found that verbal bullying is far more common than physical bullying among youth (Benbenishty & Astor, 2005; Tapper & Boulton, 2005). In fact, results of the Health Behavior in School Aged Children Survey, a nationally representative survey conducted in the United States, revealed that 51.4% of respondents had been verbally bullied within a two month period (Wang, Ianotti, & Nansel, 2009). Such figures reveal the overwhelming pervasiveness of bullying in schools and illustrate its predominant manifestation among youth.

While verbal and physical bullying are direct forms of aggression, indirect forms of bullying such as *relational bullying*, also affect adolescent youth. Relational bullying can be defined as harm to another through social manipulation, such as damage to relationships or

damage to feelings of group acceptance (Cullerton-Sen & Crick, 2005; McGrath, 2007). To date, little information exists regarding the overall prevalence of this type of bullying, which is not surprising given its covert nature.

An additional form of bullying that can also be carried out rather covertly is *cyberbullying*. Cyberbullying is defined as an aggressive, purposeful act, perpetrated by a group or individual, using electronic forms of communication (e.g., cellular phones, websites, email), repeatedly over time, with intention to harm (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Smith et al., 2008). Since cyberbullying perpetrators can remain anonymous and do not directly witness the harm they cause to their victims, they may engage in more aggressive and audacious acts of violence. In other words, since cyberbullies may not immediately and directly view the harmful consequences of their bullying on their victims, their bullying may be even more continuous and harsh (Smith et al., 2008).

Research has demonstrated the prevalence of cyberbullying. In one study involving 177 Canadian high school students, 25% of students reported being a victim of cyberbullying (Li, 2007). Research has also demonstrated the problem of cyberbullying among adolescents in the United States (Ybarra, & Mitchell, 2007). Given the pervasive use of electronic communication among children and teens, cyberbullying is likely to become increasingly common.

Whereas the forms of bullying mentioned thus far have been categorized by the ways in which they are perpetrated (e.g., verbally, physically, relationally), bullying can also be categorized by its focus and content. For example, in certain jurisdictions in the United States (Brown, Chesney-Lind, & Stein, 2007; Gruber & Fineran, 2008; Stein, 2003) and in Canada (Public Safety Canada, 20 09) sexual harassment has been categorized as a form of bullying.

Since sexual harassment has been defined from multiple perspectives (e.g., psychological, legal, feminist) and has been studied in different contexts (e.g., in the workplace, among youth), scholars have struggled to agree upon a single accepted definition of sexual harassment (McMaster, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2002; Ormerod, Collinsworth, & Perry, 2008; Ortega, Sanchez, Ortega-Rivera, Nocentini, Menesini, 2010). A commonly used definition of sexual harassment is, "unwanted or unwelcome sexual behavior that interferes with one's life'' (AAUW, 2001). According to public Safety Canada (2009), some behaviours that characterize sexual harassment include teasing, discussing sexual topics, spreading sexual rumors, evaluating another person's body parts, calling people names, telling sexual jokes, and taking part in uninvited sexual touching and assault. Similar to general bullying, sexual harassment involves a power imbalance between the perpetrator and the victim, and the harassment is unwelcomed, purposeful and repetitive. Yet clearly unique to sexual harassment is the focus of its content, which is sexualized (Felix & McMahon, 2006). The prevalence of sexual harassment is evidenced by a 2001 study conducted by the American Association of University Women (AAUW), a highly cited U.S. nation-wide study, which revealed that 83% of girls and 79% of boys in grades 8-11 report experiences of sexual harassment. As the results of the AAUW study highlight, aggression among youth often has a sexual focus and affects males and females alike.

Although the term *sexual harassment* has been viewed by some as a form of bullying that has a sexual focus, Meyer (2009) argues that bullying and harassment have certain commonalities, but are separate phenomena. She points to literature which maintains that while bullying is generally directed toward individual victims, harassment can target individuals, groups, or more broadly, it may contaminate an environment, making it feel unsafe for many (Land, 2003 as cited in Meyer, 2009). Most critically, she posits that much of the harassment

that takes place in schools places a focus on gender and specifically on maintaining stereotypical gender roles. Given the broader influence of harassment and its often gender-focused nature, Meyer put forward the concept of *gendered harassment*, which encompasses behaviors that serve to maintain traditional gender norms (Meyer, 2009). The utility of the concept of gendered harassment is that it elucidates the importance of examining sociocultural forces that create and uphold rigid gender norms and reinforce a power differential between men and women. Moreover, it sheds light on aggression among youth in all its various forms (e.g., physical, verbal) as a mechanism of power that serves to maintain the dominance of certain groups in society over others.

Although Meyer uses the term *gendered harassment*, for the purpose of this discussion, the term *bullying* will continue to be utilized, but with the inclusion of her position that bullying is often gendered, can be directed at individuals or groups and can create toxic environments for youth because it upholds certain societal power structures. Clearly gender represents a significant factor at play in the phenomenon of bullying. In fact, gender and other related constructs are themes that resonate throughout other predominant areas of study within the literature on bullying. Some important areas of focus within the literature on bullying include, child and adolescent development, and sex differences in bullying behaviours. These areas require fuller discussion in order to provide a comprehensive picture of the factors that characterize bullying.

Characteristics of Bullying

Developmental Factors

Child and adolescent development is a central issue that has been found to influence the nature of bullying. Research clearly shows that as girls and boys develop from childhood to

adolescence, their bullying behaviors change, and such changes may be partially due to development in cognitive and emotional capacities, as well as to the transformations that occur during pubertal development. To begin, as the cognitive and emotional capacities of boys and girls develop from preschool to high school, they engage in less physical bullying and increasingly utilize relational, verbal, and cyberbullying tactics (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Pepler et al., 2006). Accordingly, relational and verbal bullying are more sophisticated forms of aggression than physical bullying, as they require greater understanding of social relationships, are more inconspicuous, and require more planning. Furthermore, relational and verbal bullying may become more frequent, since physical bullying becomes increasingly viewed as socially unacceptable among youth as they mature.

Developmental changes that occur during puberty are another age-related element said to influence bullying behaviors. Development during puberty leads to a greater awareness of one's own, as well as others' developing sexuality and gender behaviour (Craig & Pepler, 2003). For many adolescents, sexuality is an especially sensitive topic, one that is used as a means through which to bully. In fact, research has shown that sexual harassment between boys and girls increases through the early adolescent years associated with puberty (Craig & Pepler, 2003; Pepler et al., 2006; McMaster et al., 2002). That being the case, it should be clarified that the relationship between development during puberty and increasing rates of sexual harassment is not meant to justify this behavior (McMaster et al., 2002); it is simply an observation from the sexual harassment literature. Nevertheless, the association found between sexual harassment and pubertal development coincides well with Meyer's (2009) conceptualization of *gendered harassment* in that it supports the notion that adolescent aggression is frequently sexualized and linked to societal gender norms, which youth must negotiate as they form their identities. While

many factors influence adolescent behaviour, the intersection of developmental and sociocultural forces provides a context through which to better understand the bullying that occurs among youth, one that points to the salience of sexuality and gender in adolescent aggression.

Sex Differences in Bullying

Although it is evident that bullying behaviours shift in modes of perpetration and in content over the course of development, questions still remain regarding potential sex differences that exist within adolescent bullying. Specifically, do male and female youth eventually adopt divergent bullying behaviours? Before exploring this question, it should be noted that researchers have predominantly referred to differences found between male and female participants in their bullying research as "gender differences". However, for the purpose of this literature review, results of studies that examined differences between males and females will be referred to as "sex differences" so as not to conflate gender with biological sex. As stated by the American Psychological Association (APA), sex is defined as "a person's biological status and is typically categorized as male, female, or intersex" and gender is defined as "the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex…" ("Practice Guidelines for LGB Clients", 2012, p. 10).

There are few areas of agreement among researchers concerning sex differences in bullying. Indeed the literature on sex differences in bullying is rife with contradictions, particularly concerning: (a) sex differences in perpetration of relational bullying, (b) sex differences in cyberbullying perpetration and victimization, and (c) sex differences in sexual harassment victimization. The following section will elucidate each of these contradictions and will note the areas of consensus.

The literature on sex differences in the perpetration of relational bullying primarily holds that girls exhibit this type of bullying more than boys (Merrell et al., 2006; Putallaz, Kupersmidt, Coie, McKnight, & Grimes, 2004; Paquette & Underwood, 1999; Russel & Owens, 1999; Yoon, Barton, & Tasiariol, 2004). However, a minority of researchers has claimed opposite findings (Goldstein & Tisak, 2004), and some research has found no differences in the perpetration of relational bullying between sexes (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996; Prinstein, Boergers, & Vernberg, 2001). Merrell et al. (2006) explain that these contradictory results may be due to a number of factors, including how the construct of relational aggression is defined, the age and sex composition of the groups being examined (e.g., same or mixed sex groups), methodological issues, and the extent to which youth hold gender stereotypes.

Given the limitations in the relational bullying literature and the results found to date, it is important not to presume that relational bullying is a "female" form of aggression. In fact, it is possible that many researchers have fallen prey to this very supposition that relational bullying is inherently feminine, which impedes them from identifying the various and perhaps distinct ways in which boys participate in this form of aggression. Only a few studies to date have revealed findings wherein the bullying perpetrated by boys toward girls could be characterized as relational, and this bullying had sexual undertones (e.g., Shute, Owens, & Slee, 2008). Thus, it may be necessary to broaden the accepted notions of relational bullying to include sexually-focused aggression. Despite some areas of uncertainty, researchers have agreed that girls are more often *victims* of relational bullying than boys, and that girls have a more distressed reaction to relational bullying than boys, potentially resulting in more serious psychological consequences for them (Crick et al., 2002; Goldstein & Tisak, 2004; Merrell et al., 2006; Paquette & Underwood, 1999). In light of the uncertain role that boys play in relational bullying, the greater

victimization of girls, and the potentially severe reaction that girls experience therein, there is clearly a need for more research into the sex differences that exist in this form of aggression.

Although a number of factors related to sex differences in relational bullying remain unclear, particularly the role that boys play in this form of aggression, there is consensus that boys are more likely to physically bully and to be victims of physical and other forms of direct bullying (e.g., yelling and damage to property) than girls (Dao et al., 2006; Espelage, Bosworth, & Simon, 2004; Olweus, 1993; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005; Wang et al., 2009). The fact that boys have more involvement with physical bullying than girls is not surprising as it aligns well with dominant societal gender norms for boys (Phoenix, Frosh, & Pattman, 2003), as well as developmental factors (Archer & Coyne, 2005).

Similar to relational bullying, the research on sex differences in cyberbullying perpetration and victimization has also produced varied results. By gathering student self-reports, the majority of studies have found that cyberbullies are predominantly male (Kiriakidis & Kavoura, 2010; Li, 2006; Wang, et al., 2009; Ybarra and Mitchell, 2007), while other research has found no significant sex differences in cyberbullying perpetration (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Smith, et al., 2008). Regarding victims of cyberbullying, there is evidence to suggest that girls are more often victims compared to boys (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009; Smith, et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2009), yet other studies have not found significant sex differences in cyberbullying victimization experiences (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Li, 2006; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004).

As with relational bullying, the varied results in terms of sex differences in cyberbullying may be due to methodological and measurement issues **(**Kiriakidis & Kavoura, 2010). However, some researchers have also speculated that the sex differences observed may be due to gender socialization, in which women are socialized to be passive and men are socialized to be

aggressive, while those who cross these circumscribed gender lines are marginalized (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). In support of this contention, it has been found that in comparison with girls, boys are unlikely to report being a victim of cyberbullying or bullying in general, and that when boys do report victimization experiences, they are apt to relay their story of being targeted as if it happened to a friend rather than to themselves (Felix & McMahon, 2006; Hoff & Mitchell, 2009). Additionally, the content of cyberbullying messages is linked to gender norms; Hoff and Mitchell (2009) found that males were primarily cyberbullied about their sexual orientation and athletic inability, whereas females were mainly cyberbullied about their appearance, sexual attractiveness, promiscuity, and popularity, and secondary to these topics was a focus on their minority statuses (e.g., disability, religion). The gendered content of cyberbullying has also been noted by other authors (e.g., Shariff, 2008). While it is clear that both male and female youth participate in cyberbullying in various ways, the exact extent to which this is so remains unclear. However, what emerges more definitively is the ways in which cyberbullying specifically, and bullying generally, are regulated by societal gender norms.

In terms of sex differences in experiences of sexual harassment victimization, there are also inconsistencies, with some evidence showing that both genders are equally likely to report being victims of sexual harassment (AAUW, 2001; Gruber & Fineran, 2008), while other evidence shows that girls are more likely to be victims of sexual harassment (Goldstein, Malanchuck, Davis-Kean, & Eccles, 2007; Walsh, Duffy, & Gallagher-Duffy, 2007). However, sex differences become more concretely apparent when same-sex (sexual harassment between individuals of the same gender) and opposite-sex sexual harassment are examined separately. Same-sex and opposite-sex sexual harassment are said to be distinct in that opposite-sex sexual harassment is more likely to involve sexual advances, while same-sex sexual harassment is more

likely to involve sexual comments, jokes, gestures, rumor-spreading, and physical victimization (McMaster et al., 2002). Evidence suggests that boys are more commonly victims of same-sex sexual harassment than girls (Felix & McMahon, 2006; McMaster et al., 2002; Pepler et al., 2006; Petersen & Hyde, 2009).

In addition to the distinct types of sexual harassment that affect boys and girls, it has been found that boys and girls have different reactions to various forms of sexual harassment. Specifically, sexual harassment between boys frequently involves homophobic name calling (McMaster et al., 2002; Thurlow, 2001), which has been identified by boys as the most upsetting form of ridicule (Fineran & Gruber, 2008). In contrast, girls have identified sexual rumors as being the most disturbing form of sexual harassment (Fineran & Gruber, 2008). Clearly there exist some sex differences in the way that sexual harassment is experienced by youth.

Overall, while some areas of agreement in terms of sex differences in bullying can be found, that is, that girls are more often victims of relational bullying, that boys are more often the victims and the perpetrators of physical and direct forms of bullying, and that boys are more often victims of same-sex sexual harassment, sex differences in bullying are not yet fully understood. The lack of clarity regarding sex differences in bullying is compounded by the fact that bullying behaviours are gendered. In other words, dominant societal gender norms influence the ways in which bullying is enacted and reported by male and female youth, as well as the ways in which it is studied by researchers. Since the impact of sociocultural forces on bullying is just beginning to be taken into account, it is important to avoid categorizing any form of bullying as typically male or female behaviour. Instead, bullying can be viewed as a range of behaviours in which both genders participate to some degree (Besag, 2006). Regardless of the exact nature of sex differences in bullying, its consequences continue to wreak havoc on the well being of

youth. Therefore, it is important to gain a richer understanding of the toll that bullying takes on adolescents.

Consequences of Bullying

A societal myth exists which posits that being a victim of bullying during one's youth builds strength of character. However, the research on bullying has not indicated any such positive effects for youth (Berger, 2007). In fact, the negative effects of bullying have been widely documented in scientific research. Studies examining male and female youth as a group indicate that those who are bullied are likely to experience self-blame, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress, loneliness, low self-esteem, psychosomatic symptoms, addictive behaviours, and suicide ideation or attempts (Graham & Bellmore, 2007; Houbre et al., 2006; Nansel et al., 2001; Nishina et al., 2005). Bullying is also related to attentional difficulties, absenteeism from school, and poor academic achievement (Beale, 2001; Kumpulainen, Rasanen, & Puura, 2001; Nishina et al., 2005). In sum, these results underscore the influence of bullying as a threat to youth.

Further demonstrating the harmful consequences of bullying on youth, research has also shown that one need not be directly involved in bullying to experience its negative effects. In fact, it has been found that witnessing bullying can be detrimental to young people's health (Janosz et al., 2008; Rivers, Poteat, Noret, & Ashurst, 2009). For example, Rivers, Poteat, Noret, and Ashurst (2009) demonstrated that for adolescent youth, witnessing bullying at school is related to higher levels of substance use. Additionally, Janosz et al. (2008) revealed that witnessing or even hearing about school violence from peers, which included any verbal, physical, psychological, or visual threats of harm occurring within a school setting, was related to increases in aggressive behaviour, negative feelings about school, and avoidance of school. It

has been posited that increases in aggressive behaviour among witnesses of bullying may be due to the normalization of violence in schools, or it may be a defensive stance that youth adopt in unsafe school environments. Similarly, avoidance of school may also be related to the fear that comes from being in a threatening school environment (Janosz et al., 2008). Some studies have even found that among adolescents, witnessing violence is a better predictor of school adjustment and behavioural problems (e.g., decrease in school engagement, increased truancy, engagement in physical aggression and property damage) than being victimized directly (Flannery, Wester, & Singer, 2004; Janosz et al., 2008; O'Keefe, 1997).

The results regarding the negative consequences of witnessing bullying are quite alarming given that bullying events often have many witnesses (Bonanno & Hymel, 2006 as cited in Trach, Hymel, Waterhouse, & Neale, 2010; Craig & Pepler, 1998; Rivers, Poteat, Noret, & Ashurst, 2009). Moreover, merely being informed of school bullying occurrences has the potential to negatively influence youth by raising feelings of insecurity in school contexts, increasing school avoidance, and leading students to preemptively use aggressive forms of coping (Janosz et al., 2008). Therefore, the number of students being affected by bullying has likely been underestimated.

Clearly bullying represents a health threat to youth. However, compared to the research on the effects of bullying on young males and females as a group, far less research focuses specifically on the distinct effects of bullying on boys and girls separately. That being the case, within the studies examining males and females as a group, certain similarities and differences between genders have been demonstrated, with some contradictory results being revealed. For example, some studies have shown that both male and female victims of bullying are at similar risk of experiencing depression (Luk, Wang, & Simons-Morton, 2010; Seals & Young, 2003;

Undheim & Sund, 2010). In contrast, other research has found that compared to boys, girls who are victimized by bullying are at greater risk of experiencing depression (Nickerson & Slater, 2009), as well as suicidal ideation (Fleming & Jacobsen, 2009). However, Klomek, Marrocco, Kleinman, Schonfeld, and Gould (2008) and Kim et al. (2005) revealed a more complex picture, showing that for girls, being bullied at any frequency is related to increased risk of depression, suicidal ideation, and attempts, whereas for boys, more persistent bullying is related to these adverse psychological outcomes. Additionally, girls are more likely than boys to perceive themselves as vulnerable to multiple forms of bullying (May & Dunaway, 2000 as cited in Dao et al., 2006), and furthermore, it appears that the fear of being bullied is more strongly related to psychological distress in girls than boys (Dao et al., 2006; Nickerson & Slater, 2009). Taken as a whole, and without minimizing the negative consequences of bullying on male adolescents, evidence suggests that girls may be especially sensitive to the destructive effects of bullying.

Interestingly, the effect of various forms of bullying on boys and girls may depend on the sex of the perpetrator (Felix & McMahon, 2006). Specifically, Felix and McMahon (2006) found that for both boys and girls, being victimized by a boy, as opposed to by a girl, was associated with more negative psychological and behavioral problems. Such findings may be due to the fact that boys are generally socialized to be more aggressive and confrontational and thus are perceived as representing a greater threat.

Sex differences have also been demonstrated with regard to relational bullying. For instance, girls regard relational bullying as more harmful than boys (Crick et al., 2002; Goldstein & Tisak, 2004; Merrell et al., 2006), and they report higher levels of negative affect than boys in response to relational victimization (Crick et al., 2002; Paquette & Underwood, 1999). In contrast, boys tend to consider physical bullying more harmful than relational bullying (Archer

& Coyne, 2005). While it is possible that boys also have very serious reactions to relational bullying, such findings have yet to be confirmed. Collectively, the results that have been discussed thus far suggest that girls and boys are differentially affected by bullying. However, as previously mentioned, these findings come from studies in which girls and boys were predominantly examined together as a group, and gender was only secondary to other research questions. While these studies have yielded valuable information about bullying, their group focus risks obscuring potentially important differences between how girls and boys experience bullying. Therefore, in order to more fully understand the similar and different ways in which girls and boys are affected by bullying, studies focusing specifically on males and females alone are needed.

Gender and Sexually-Focused Bullying: Homophobic Bullying

Thus far, this discussion has illuminated how adolescent bullying can be understood in its developmental context, as adolescence represents a crucial stage of development in which gender and sexuality become particularly salient. Furthermore, a review of the bullying literature has demonstrated how adolescent bullying occurs along gender lines, as well as how it is associated with the maintenance of dominantly accepted gender roles in society (Meyer, 2009). However, when discussing issues related to gender, the inextricable link between sexuality and gender must be acknowledged. Specifically, in North American culture, what it means to be a man or a woman is determined by adherence to prescribed gender roles for masculinity and femininity, and moreover, these gender roles are defined by the dictates of heteronormativity. Consequently, when an individual violates the prevailing standards for behaviour based on gender, they also go against the hegemony of heterosexuality. Therefore, while bullying in general can serve to enforce the boundaries of traditional gender norms, it also functions to maintain the dominance

of heterosexuality. Bullying that is explicitly focused on an individual's gender expression or sexual orientation has been of interest in research, and has been referred to as homophobic bullying.

Homophobic bullying has been defined as, "any form of physical (e.g., hitting or kicking), relational (e.g., spreading rumors or teasing), or social (e.g., being ignored) aggression perpetrated against an individual because of his or her actual or perceived sexual orientation, or because the individual's behavior is not typical of his or her sex" (Rivers et al., 2007). It is important to emphasize that any individual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, questioning (LGBTQ) or heterosexual, who appears to deviate from what is considered socially acceptable sexual and gender norms can be targeted with homophobic bullying. Homophobic bullying tends to begin among youth around the onset of puberty (11-13 years) (D'Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2006; Renold, 2002, Rivers et al., 2007) and may be experienced by youth throughout the secondary school years (Rivers et al., 2007).

It would appear that homophobic bullying is a symptom of societal homophobia and heterosexism, which continues to plague North America. In fact, some U.S. states and communities still overtly deny lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) individuals their fundamental freedoms (Baker, 2002). Homophobia has been referred to as "the last respected prejudice of the century" (Baker, 2002, p. 2). While youth in general are impacted by the social constraints imposed by heterosexism, those who identify as LGBTQ are especially susceptible to the negative influence of the heterosexism and sexual stigma that are conveyed by individuals and institutions (Herek, 2009). Although heterosexist attitudes may be expressed covertly, they create environments that are clearly unsafe to LGBTQ individuals, engendering in

them a continual sense of threat or vigilance, as well as the need to keep their sexual orientation a secret (Herek, 2009).

It seems that homophobia is deeply embedded in bullying behaviours in general. For example, it has been found that the use of homophobic epithets is a common part of bullying behaviours among both male and female youth (Poteat & Espelage, 2005; Poteat & Rivers, 2010). In fact, Swearer, Turner, Givens, and Pollack (2008) showed that 26% of boys (ninth through eleventh grades) who were victims of bullying were targeted with homophobic epithets. The prevalent use of homophobic pejoratives was also found by Thurlow (2001), who showed that 10 percent of the 6000 pejoratives employed by English and Welsh secondary school students were homophobic in nature. Finally, evidence suggests that peer groups that are high on general aggression perpetration also tend to have more negative attitudes toward LGBTQ youth and use homophobic epithets more frequently (Poteat, 2008). Clearly, homophobic attitudes are recurrent within bullying behaviours.

Given the pervasiveness of homophobic attitudes, it is not surprising that homophobic bullying is quite prevalent. For example, among the respondents in the 2007 National School Climate Survey, sexual orientation and gender expression were named as the most common reasons for being bullied at school (Kosciw et al.,, 2008). Similarly, in their National Survey of Homophobia in Canadian High Schools, Egale Canada, a Canadian LGBTQ human rights organization, found that LGBTQ students and students with LGBTQ parents experienced much higher levels of verbal and physical abuse than other students (Taylor & Peter, 2011). Research clearly demonstrates that LGBTQ adolescents are often targets of homophobic bullying.

Types of Homophobic Bullying and Prevalence

The types of homophobic bullying that are perpetrated by youth closely mirror the various forms of general bullying, with a focus placed on the victim's actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender expression. The types of homophobic bullying discussed in the literature are verbal homophobic bullying, physical homophobic bullying, and to a lesser extent, relational homophobic bullying, and homophobic cyberbullying.

Verbal homophobic bullying in high schools appears to be the predominant form, with 86.2% of respondents in the National School Climate Survey (2007) reporting experiences of verbal harassment at school because of their sexual orientation, and 65.5% were verbally harassed because of their gender expression. In addition, 90.2% of students heard "gay" used in a negative way at school (Kosciw et al., 2008). Overall, the frequency of verbal homophobic bullying has been well documented in research (e.g., Bochenek & Brown, 2001; D'Augelli, et al., 2006; D'Augelli, Pilkington, & Hershberger, 2002; Taylor & Peter, 2011), which is alarming, given that it perpetuates negative attitudes about lesbian, gay, and bisexual identities and is hurtful to youth. It seems that for most young males, being labeled as homosexual is the greatest insult, and it is associated with social humiliation and alienation (Baker, 2002; Phoenix, Frosh, & Pattman, 2003; Mishna, Newman, Daley, & Solomon, 2009; Swearer, Turner, Givens, & Pollack, 2008). In fact, youth may be more insulted by homophobic name calling than racial slurs (Rivers, 2001). Sadly, for many adolescents, experiencing verbal and other forms of homophobic bullying is a regular, or even an everyday occurrence (Bochenek & Brown, 2001; Kosciw et al., 2008).

The frequency of verbal homophobic bullying is disturbing given that if it is left uncorrected by school staff, it can easily intensify into physical bullying (Bochenek & Brown,

2001). In the National School Climate Survey, 44.1% of respondents had been physically harassed due to their sexual orientation (Kosciw et al., 2008) and more than one in five of Egale Canada's LGBTQ survey respondents had experienced physical harassment (Taylor & Peter, 2011). Additionally, in a 2002 study by D'Augelli, Pilkington, and Hershberger, 11% of participants had been physically bullied because of their sexual orientation. The number of students facing physical homophobic bullying only further underscores the severity of this issue and the extreme threat that it poses to youth.

Apart from physical and verbal, homophobic bullying can take other forms as well, including cyberbullying (Shariff, 2008). Shariff (2008) notes that homophobic harassment is a common part of cyberbullying, but little if any research examines the particularities of homophobic content in cyberbullying or the frequency of perpetration. Another possible form of homophobic bullying is relational homophobic bullying. Very little if any research has been conducted on relational homophobic bullying compared to general relational bullying, and specific prevalence rates of relational homophobic bullying are not available. However, preliminary evidence suggests that relational homophobic bullying is occurring. For example, Rivers (2001) found that relational bullying was commonly experienced by gay and lesbian youth; Poteat and Espelage (2005) found a strong correlation between homophobic content and relational aggression; and Poteat, Espelage, and Koenig (2009) demonstrated that relational homophobic bullying is common among heterosexual youth. Finally, a study by D'Augelli et al. (2002) points to the potential salience of relational homophobic bullying, in that that 39% of the LGBTQ participants reported loss of friends due to their sexual orientation, which is suggestive of the social stigmatization that occurs in relational bullying. Although more research is needed to reveal the prevalence and complexities of relational homophobic bullying, the mounting

number of studies that identify occurrences of relational homophobic bullying suggests that it is indeed taking place. While the specificities of the different forms of homophobic bullying have yet to be fully uncovered, it is clear that homophobia pervades bullying behaviours overall.

Sex Differences in Homophobic Bullying

Taking the different forms of homophobic bullying into consideration, and in light of the sex differences that have been found within the various types of general bullying, there is a need to examine the sex differences that exist within homophobic bullying. Primarily, it has been established that both boys and girls perpetrate homophobic bullying (Poteat & Espelage, 2005; Poteat & Rivers, 2010; Rivers et al., 2007). However, it has been found that boys are more likely than girls to employ and be targeted with homophobic epithets (Poteat & Espelage, 2005), and in general, a greater association has been found between homophobic language and boys' bullying compared with girls' bullying (Poteat & Rivers, 2010). The greater use of homophobic epithets among boys may be due to the fact that they use such language in their everyday verbal banter (Poteat & Espelage, 2005; Poteat & Rivers, 2010). However, it has also been posited that the greater utilization of homophobic epithets among boys may be related to the pressure that they experience to prove their masculinity (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003), a topic which will be addressed at a later point in this discussion. In contrast to boys who use homophobic language in various contexts, girls' use of homophobic epithets has been found to be specifically associated with their involvement in bullying events (Poteat & Rivers, 2010). Thus, it could be posited that girls' employment of homophobic epithets is more strictly hostile in its intent. Overall, it is evident that sex differences exist in the perpetration of homophobic bullying.

Although preliminary evidence points to greater involvement of boys in homophobic bullying compared to girls, a more fine-grained examination of sex differences in homophobic

bullying across sexual orientations and across the various bullying roles reveals a more intricate picture. Until recently, most studies examining the bullying experiences of sexual minority youth have grouped LGBTQ individuals into one category, thereby masking any important differences that may exist between individuals based on their sexual orientation. To date, one study by Berlan, Corliss, Field, Goodman, and Austin (2010) has explicitly examined sex differences in bullying victimization and perpetration as it intersects with sexual orientation. Berlan et al. (2010) asked their participants to indicate their sexual orientation on a Likert scale, which included the following response options: *completely heterosexual; mostly heterosexual; bisexual; mostly homosexual;* and *completely homosexual*. The authors found that mostly heterosexual and gay males reported being bullied more frequently than completely heterosexual males, and that gay males were least likely to report that they bullied others. Among the female participants, the authors found that bullying victimization and perpetration were more common among bisexual and mostly heterosexual females compared to completely heterosexual females, while lesbian youth did not report bullying others (Berlan et al., 2010). Although previous studies have similarly shown that sexual minority youth as a group are at high risk of victimization (Kosciw et al., 2007), this is the first study to show that bisexual and mostly heterosexual females are at greater risk of perpetrating bullying than heterosexual females.

In accounting for these results, Berlan et al. (2010) compared their findings to a previous study conducted by Pinhey and Brown (2005) in Guam, which similarly showed that sexual minority girls reported greater levels of participation in aggression at school. However, Pinhey and Brown's study revealed that the physically aggressive behaviour of the sexual minority girls was specifically associated with feeling unsafe or being threatened and thus it may have been self-protective in nature. While the bullying behaviours of the participants in the study by Berlan

et al. may have also been defensive, this cannot be confirmed by the data. Clearly, more investigation into the homophobic bullying experiences of young women is necessary in order to reveal the contextual, psychological, and sociocultural factors underlying this phenomenon.

An additional area of research with regard to sex differences in homophobic bullying concerns the use of homophobic language across bullying roles. Apart from the primary bully and the victim, the other bullying roles which have been identified include: *assistant* (teams up with/assists the bully); *bystander* (encourages the bully or does not get involved) *defender* (helps the victim); and *outsiders* (those who avoid involvement in bullying) (Salmivalli, 2010; Shariff, 2008; Twemlow, Fonagy, & Sacco, 2004). With the various bullying roles in mind, Poteat and Rivers (2010) found that for both boys and girls, participation in the assistant role within bullying episodes did not predict greater utilization of homophobic language, however the intersection of gender and other bullying roles were more complex. Specifically, it was found that boys who participate in multiple bullying roles, namely, the roles of bully and reinforcer, report greater use of homophobic epithets than boys who engaged in fewer bullying roles. Furthermore, among girls, involvement in the reinforcer role predicted more frequent use of homophobic epithets, but this association was even stronger for girls who also engaged in the primary bully role (Poteat & Rivers, 2010). From these results, Poteat and Rivers concluded that girls who use homophobic epithets as part of their bullying behaviour may represent a "select subgroup of girls" (Poteat & Rivers, 2010, p. 171), while other girls may direct the focus of their bullying on different traits (Poteat & Rivers, 2010). Examining sex differences in the use of homophobic epithets across bullying roles highlights the fact that participation in homophobic bullying goes beyond the bully-victim dichotomy, and furthermore, within the various bullying

roles, it is clear that that homophobic epithets are used as a means of aggression by both boys and girls.

Psychological and Social Consequences

Research shows that the consequences of being bullied due to sexual orientation or gender expression are similar in nature to general bullying, and these consequences can be severe. Studies examining LGBTQ youth as a group indicate that effects of homophobic bullying may include depression (D'Augelli et al., 2002; Espelage et al., 2008; Rivers, 2004;), anxiety (Rivers, 2006), PTSD **(**D'Augelli et al., 2006; Rivers, 2004), suicidal thoughts (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002; Espelage et al., 2008; Rivers, 2001), attempted suicide (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002; D'Augelli et al., 2002), and increased health risk behaviors such as using alcohol or drugs (Espelage & Swearer, 2002; Espelage et al., 2008; Rivers & Noret, 2008). The severe psychological consequences of bullying are undeniable and well documented.

In addition to its association with psychological difficulties, homophobic bullying has been found to hinder school performance. Common consequences of enduring homophobic bullying in school include lowered academic achievement, as well as high levels of absenteeism and school dropout (Bochenek & Brown, 2001; Dupper & Meyer-Adams, 2002; Rivers, 2004). The 2007 National School Climate Survey found that close to one-third of LGBTQ students reported skipping class and missing school at least once in the past month due to safety concerns. Moreover, compared to other students, those who were victims of physical homophobic bullying were almost three times more likely to have missed school in the past month (Kosciw et al., 2008). The absenteeism that is associated with being a victim of homophobic bullying is consistent with past studies which showed that victims of bullying are less likely to feel connected to their school (Espelage & Holt, 2001; Poteat & Espelage, 2005). In addition, the

percentage of LGBTQ students in the National School Climate Survey sample who did not plan to pursue any type of post-secondary education was almost twice that of a U.S. national sample (12.4% versus 6.6%) (Kosciw et al., 2008). Similarly, another study found that LGB individuals who attained lower levels of education were more likely to have experienced physical bullying than LGB individuals with higher levels of education (Henrickson, 2008). The culmination of findings suggest that experiencing homophobic bullying can be detrimental to school performance overall, which is disconcerting, given the importance of educational attainment to economic advancement and stability in adulthood.

Research clearly shows the detrimental effects of homophobic bullying on LGBTQ youth as a group, but the ways in which homophobic bullying distinctly effect male and female youth of differing sexual orientations has yet to be examined. Unfortunately, very little research has disaggregated the effects of homophobic bullying on youth based on gender and sexual orientation (Berlan et al., 2010). However, the extant findings to date will be examined.

Female youth. Research concentrating exclusively on the consequences of homophobic bullying on female youth in high school contexts is scarce, and this is true whether a focus is placed on heterosexual females or lesbian and bisexual females. For instance, an extensive search of the extant literature published within the last 10 years did not yield a single study exclusively addressing the victimization of lesbian and bisexual female youth in high school settings due to their sexual orientation or gender expression. Additionally, little is known about the effects of homophobic bullying on heterosexual female youth, however Poteat and Espelage (2007), who examined the effects of homophobic language on heterosexual youth, demonstrated that being a victim of verbal homophobic bullying was related to social withdrawal behavior specifically in girls. Also significant, Duncan (1999) revealed that harassment occurring

between girls often involves language that is sexualized (e.g., “slut”, “whore”), and that girls in high schools used the word ‘lesbian’ as an insult towards other girls. Moreover, the sexualized language, which included homophobic content, was considered highly insulting and provoked some victims to change schools. The negative connotations that some girls associate with the word ‘lesbian’ was further illustrated by Duncan (2004) whose interviews with tenth grade girls revealed their belief that identifying as lesbian would diminish one’s popularity in school. Thus, although the extent of homophobic bullying occurring amongst heterosexual, female youth is unclear, the existing literature implies that when it does occur, verbal homophobic bullying is detrimental to girls.

Male youth. The literature on the effects of homophobic bullying specifically on male youth is more substantial than the literature on female youth. Resultantly, more has been written on the consequences of homophobic bullying on heterosexual males than on gay and bisexual males. First, concerning the effects of homophobic bullying on gay and bisexual male youth, research has found that being a victim of homophobic bullying was related to suicidality in boys who identified as gay (Friedman, Koeske, Silvestre, Korr, & Sites, 2006). In addition, Bontempo and D’Augelli (2002) found that gay, bisexual, and questioning males who had been victimized reported significantly higher levels of marijuana and cocaine use and suicidality on average than lesbian, bisexual and questioning females. Clearly gay, bisexual, and questioning male youth experience aversive reactions to homophobic bullying (Bontempo & D’Augelli, 2002).

In deciphering the differential effects of homophobic bullying on youth based on gender and sexual orientation, the literature was most clear and concise regarding heterosexual male youth. It has been found that although heterosexual boys tend to minimize the effects of being the target of homophobic epithets (Phoenix et al., 2003), homophobic bullying may actually be

particularly disturbing to heterosexual boys. Specifically, Swearer et al. (2008) found that out of 121 ninth grade boys who had been bullied, 32 had been called homophobic names, and these boys experienced more psychological distress than boys who were bullied, but not called such names. In addition, Poteat and Espelage (2007) found that verbal homophobic bullying targeted at heterosexual boys led to feelings of anxiety, depression, and lower sense of school belonging. Overall, Poteat and Espelage (2007) found that being the target of verbal homophobic bullying was a stronger predictor of negative psychological or social outcomes for male youth than for female youth. As such, it appears that regardless of sexual orientation, boys manifest serious, negative reactions to homophobic bullying. Moreover, while there are some similarities between males' and females' reactions to homophobic bullying, there are also differences. An examination of the sociocultural roots of homophobic bullying may shed light on the complexities of this topic.

Homophobic Bullying Research Methods

Investigations into the topic of homophobic bullying have predominantly used quantitative methodologies. Additionally, the most common means of data collection has been participant self-reports gathered using a variety of empirically validated questionnaires. Such questionnaires have been used to assess the nature and frequency of students' victimization through bullying and their perpetration of bullying. For example, the 9-item University of Illinois Bully Scale (Espelage & Holt, 2001, as cited in Poteat & Rivers, 2010) was commonly cited in the literature. This scale asks about frequency of perpetration of bullying over the last 30 using a Likert type scale. Self-report Questionnaires are also often used to examine the extent to which participants exhibit psychological problems such as anxiety or depression, with an example being The Youth Self-Report (YSR) (Achenbach, 1991, as cited in Felix & McMahon, 2006).

The YSR measures internalizing and externalizing behaviors by presenting statements and asking individuals to rate how true they are for them on a Likert scale. Although these are just two examples of measures utilized in the homophobic bullying literature, they demonstrate the overarching characteristics of the measures typically used in studies on this topic. The benefits and disadvantages of using this type of methodology will be discussed in a later section of this chapter.

Homophobic Bullying and the Social Construction of Masculinity

As previously indicated, scholars (e.g., Meyer, 2009) have reasoned that bullying in general stems at least in part from the reinforcement of stereotypical gender norms in society. While an association between traditional gender roles and homophobic bullying has similarly been put forward, theories regarding homophobic bullying have also placed a strong emphasis on the social construction of masculinity. A focus on the social construction of masculinity is a product of the feminist critique of dominant gender norms, which posits that not only are stereotypical gender conventions reinforced by society at large, but that masculinity is favored. In other words, in North American society, men are predominantly expected to display stereotypically masculine traits and women are expected to display stereotypically feminine traits. However, masculine characteristics are tend to be valued more highly by society. For instance, Meyer (2008) notes that the qualities that are valued in students are strength, competitiveness, and independence- qualities that are traditionally viewed as masculine. In contrast, boys who are honor students, artistic, musical, theatrical, or not athletically oriented are considered feminine and tend to be victims of bullying (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003). Furthermore, it seems that schools are institutions where stereotypical gender roles are reinforced, not only through homophobic bullying (Pascoe, 2007; Wilkinson & Pearson, 2009), but through

heterosexist curricula, resources (text books), and practices (school dances that assume heterosexual couples) that exclude LGBTQ individuals and reinforce heteronormative standards for all students. Therefore, schools are sites that maintain heterosexual socialization and silence LGBTQ individuals (Harber, 2004; Walton, 2004).

Clearly the dominant discourse that pervades schools is a masculine, heterosexist one, and this discourse is partially upheld by students themselves. The fact that students police stereotypical gender norms is evidenced by the reality that youth who do not conform to traditional sexual and gender norms tend to be at risk of being ostracized by their peers (Meyer, 2008) and being targeted with homophobic bullying. Homophobic bullying has become pervasive within adolescent peer culture as a means through which to degrade and intimidate others, regardless of the target's actual sexual orientation. Furthermore, among boys, research has indicated that homophobic bullying is used to assert one's masculinity and show dominance over others (Phoenix et al., 2003). It seems that youth, perhaps boys especially, frame their identity through comparison with subordinated "others", namely, women, sexual minorities, racial minorities, and others with marginalized identities (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003). However, males showing dominance over others is accepted or even *expected* by society (Klein & Chancer, 2000), even if it calls for belittling of others through bullying.

The psychological ramifications of frequent bullying that is gendered and homophobic can lead victims to perpetrate violence themselves, and heterosexual boys may be particularly vulnerable. Boys may feel a great deal of pressure to live up to stereotypical male gender norms, and thus taunting and name calling concerning sexual orientation may feel especially threatening, leading to violence. Between 1982 and 2001, 28 school shootings occurred in the United States. It was found that boys carried out the shootings, and that these boys, who

identified as heterosexual, had been repeatedly bullied with beatings and verbal taunts that were homophobic in nature and threatening to their masculinity. The implication here is that homophobic bullying and the pressure to conform to traditional heterosexual gender roles is associated with violence, both persecutory and retaliatory (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003).

The significant influence of homophobia among boys is described well by Kimmel and Mahler (2003) who state, "as an organizing tenet of masculinity, homophobia—the terror that others will see one as gay, as a failed man—underlies a significant amount of men's behavior, including their relationships with other men, women, and violence. One could say that homophobia is the hate that makes men straight" (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003, p. 1446). As this quote elucidates, the pressure to conform to stereotypical gender norms, and the fear of being perceived by others as deviating from these prescribed gender expectations likely underlie a significant amount of bullying behaviours, especially among males. The extant literature clearly illuminates the relationship between the homophobic bullying of boys and dominant notions of masculinity. However, it is noteworthy that girls remain invisible and unaccounted for within these theorizations, which draws attention to the need for more inclusive theories that attend to the sociocultural factors underlying the homophobic bullying experiences of both girls and boys.

Strengths and Limitations of the Literature

The extant literature on homophobic bullying represents an important starting point from which to understand this form of aggression. The preponderance of studies on homophobic bullying has used quantitative research designs. Such quantitative investigations have served to increase awareness of homophobic bullying as a real phenomenon that manifests in various forms. Furthermore, evidence overwhelmingly confirms the pervasiveness of homophobic bullying and highlights the negative social, academic, and psychological consequences that can

arise when adolescents are victimized based on their sexual orientation or gender expression. The information that has been gleaned on homophobic bullying has facilitated greater public recognition of this phenomenon, particularly the ways in which it can hinder the establishment of safe school environments and threaten the health and development of adolescents. Accordingly, the existing body of literature has served as a crucial foundation for the development of theory and policy to better understand and deal with homophobic bullying.

While the overarching strength of the existing literature on homophobic bullying is its provision of a broad and informative picture of the phenomenon, it has limitations. The utilization of the term "homophobic bullying" is a weakness in itself, as it does not capture the full extent of how individuals experience this phenomenon, nor does it encompass its diverse manifestations. As conceptualized in the literature, homophobic bullying may be targeted at any individual, LGBTQ or heterosexual based on their actual or perceived gender expression or sexual orientation. However, heterosexual individuals who are bullied due to their perceived gender expression or sexual orientation may not necessarily interpret the bullying targeted at them as homophobic. Additionally, as opposed to experiencing homophobic bullying based on one's own sexual orientation or gender expression, it is also possible to experience homophobic bullying based on having a close family member or friend who identifies as LGBTQ. However, such circumstances are not accounted for in the definition of homophobic bullying as it currently stands. Since homophobic bullying can affect such a wide range of individuals, it is important that the construct is defined in a way that embraces its fluidity.

The literature on homophobic bullying suffers from another limitation: it lacks an understanding of the various forms of homophobic bullying that exist. As noted earlier, research in the area of relational bullying has been influenced by dominant gender norms, and this has

affected the research on homophobic bullying as well. For example, data on relational bullying is often collected through student self-reports and teacher reports, however, the ways in which individuals perceive their own and others' relational bullying behaviour is influenced by the extent to which they hold gender stereotypes. Traditionally, relational bullying has been bound by gender stereotypes with it being considered a "female" form of aggression. Thus, boys' participation in relational bullying may be underestimated. However, recent research has made progress in remedying this deficit and has revealed that boys do participate in relational bullying (Shute et al., 2008). The lack of clarity regarding relational bullying has influenced the study of homophobic bullying as well, as little is known about the intersection between relational bullying and homophobic bullying. Thus the investigations into bullying continue to be limited by the dominant gender norms to which society predominantly subscribes, and consequently, important similarities and differences between the bullying behaviours of boys and girls continue to be masked.

In addition to the need for research that moves beyond traditional gender boundaries, more nuanced descriptions of homophobic bullying are needed to account for the intricacies therein. Specifically, while the negative effects of homophobic bullying on youth are broadly understood, research has barely begun to account for the ways in which experiencing homophobic bullying intersects with and is influenced by other identity variables such as race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, or physical ability. Since preliminary evidence suggests that the degree to which youth are distressed by homophobic bullying depends on the various salient identities that they hold (Poteat, Mereish, DiGiovanni, & Koenig, 2011), further research examining the intersectionality of multiple identities in relation to homophobic bullying is called for. Research examining how individuals of various identities experience homophobic bullying

may reveal important information about the vulnerability of certain groups to being targeted with homophobic bullying, and would also facilitate the development of more targeted interventions that meet the needs of specific populations.

Similar to the ways in which the multiple identities of youth have been largely unaccounted for in the research on homophobic bullying, the influence of sex differences in experiences of homophobic bullying has also been obscured. Researchers have predominantly examined the homophobic bullying experiences of males and females together as a group (Berlan et al., 2010), yet such a research design not only obscures the ways that homophobic bullying may be experienced differently by males and females, it also masks variations in experience that may occur as a result of one's sexual orientation. In fact, a striking limitation of the homophobic bullying literature is the lack of attention that has been given to adolescent females, whether heterosexual, lesbian, or bisexual. In contrast, males, especially heterosexual males, have been given more attention in scholarly writing. Indeed, much has been written regarding dominant masculinity and the heteronormative values underlying the homophobic bullying of boys (e.g., Duncan, 2006; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; McCann, Plummer, & Minichiello, 2010; Phoenix & Frosh, 2001; Phoenix et al., 2003; Swearer et al., 2008). Nevertheless, this body of research and theorization fails to provide further understanding of the bullying behviours or experiences of young females. Thus, akin to how females are marginalized by patriarchal values in society, women and girls are also silenced within the homophobic bullying literature.

Overall, little research has been conducted on homophobic bullying perpetration and victimization of girls in general, or on the contributory factors that lead to this behaviour in particular. The dearth of literature on the homophobic bullying of girls is problematic, as it

reinforces the invisibility of girls' experiences with this phenomenon. However, since research reveals that girls carry out verbal homophobic bullying (Poteat & Rivers, 2010), and since girls exhibit serious, negative reactions to certain forms of general bullying (Cullerton-Sen & Crick, 2005), the evidence suggests that girls do experience homophobic bullying and thus, they may cope with it in distinct ways. In order to protect young females from the costs associated with homophobic bullying, an investigation into how young females experience, understand, and contend with this phenomenon is imperative. Whereas quantitative research has revealed the veracity and extent of homophobic bullying, a qualitative research design lends great promise in providing rich descriptions of adolescent girls' experiences of bullying based on gender expression or sexual orientation, facilitating a deeper understanding of their unique perspectives.

Research Questions

In light of the strengths and limitations of the extant literature on homophobic bullying, the current study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do young women construct their lived experiences with gender and sexually-focused bullying as adolescents?
2. How do young women perceive the influence of experiencing gender and sexually-focused bullying during their adolescence?
3. What meaning do young women derive from their experiences with gender and sexually-focused bullying as adolescents?
4. What do young women perceive are the needs of female, adolescent victims of gender and sexually-focused bullying?

Researcher Assumptions

In the endeavor to illuminate the research questions posed in this study, it is important to acknowledge openly the preconceived notions and assumptions that I hold, which influence the way I investigate and perceive the phenomenon under study. I believe that discrimination and aggression toward individuals based on sexual orientation or gender expression is a violation of human rights and that efforts should be made to end such injustices. I also believe that no individual should feel obliged to hide their sexual or gender identity from others for fear of discrimination, social rejection, physical harm, or other negative consequences. Apart from my beliefs concerning sexual orientation and gender expression, I acknowledge that I view adolescence as a crucial stage of development during which one's identity is constructed and messages are internalized regarding gender and sexual norms. Given my views on adolescence as a critical period in the lifespan, I hold the conviction that schools should be safe environments that facilitate the intellectual, social, and emotional development of youth. Finally, in light of the strong cultural norms in North American society surrounding gender-appropriate behaviour and the struggles that women have endured over time to obtain the same rights as men, I believe that the lived experiences of women and girls are distinct from those of men and boys. While I do not assume that all women have the same experiences by virtue of being female, I do think that women's experiences with various phenomena are unique and are deserving of careful consideration.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK & METHODOLOGY

Epistemology

This study was conducted employing feminist social constructionist epistemology. Assumptions that are fundamental to feminist social constructionism (FSC) include the notions that multiple social realities exist, that knowledge is co-constructed, and that oppression is real. Unique to the feminist approach to social constructionism is that gender is viewed as a performative action. In contrast to postpositivist paradigms which hold that there is one true reality, a fundamental assumption of FSC is that each individual constructs their own notions of reality based on personal experiences. FSC thus eschews taken-for-granted notions of truth, instead maintaining as a fundamental principle that multiple, equally valid social realities exist. With its recognition of multiple realities, the goal of feminist social constructionist research is to gather participants' subjective meanings of their experiences and to utilize them as the foundation upon which to understand a phenomenon of interest (Sprague, 2005).

An additional underlying assumption of FSC is that knowledge is co-constructed. That is, individuals come to understand themselves and their world through relationships with others, and under the influence of the social environment (Sprague, 2005). As such, FSC emphasizes the continuous, day-to-day social processes through which individuals define their identities and make meaning of their environments (Parton, 2003). Since knowledge is seen as co-constructed, the FSC researcher is not viewed as an objective documenter of participants' experiences, but rather as an active, socially-situated, and value-laden participant in the "constructive process" (Haverkamp & Young, 2007, p. 277).

Apart from the underlying assumptions of multiple realities and co-constructed knowledge, feminist social constructionist epistemology is anti-oppressive. FSC recognizes that

knowledge is situated, meaning that it is created in specific temporal, social, moral, political, and economic contexts that serve to maintain certain power structures (Gergen, 1985). Therefore, what is deemed by society as 'truth' is in fact the most widely agreed upon construction in a particular historical moment. FSC researchers recognize the privilege and power they have to be able to conduct and disseminate research, and contribute to the construction of knowledge. Therefore, one of the aims of the feminist social constructionist researcher is to conduct research as a means of reducing oppression and engendering social change. By acknowledging the process through which certain notions of reality come to be privileged, feminist social constructionist research challenges dominant meaning systems that are oppressive, thereby empowering and giving voice to individuals who have been marginalized (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). Since the results of FSC research highlights the perspectives of those who have been silenced and prompts the widespread questioning of unjust societal suppositions, it represents a vehicle of social reform.

Some have argued (e.g.,Burman, 1990) that the feminist social constructionist goal of reducing oppression is incongruent with its relativist ontological grounding. A critique has been put forward that if all notions of reality are socially constructed, and if all views of reality are equally valid, any rationale for taking action against injustice is weakened (Bohan, 1993). On the contrary, FSC is not an "anything goes" epistemology (Gergen, 1985). The goal of FSC is to illuminate the values and motives that undergird dominant ways of knowing, and accordingly, people have a responsibility to make ethical choices about which value systems to support and which to oppose. Thus, FSC is not antithetical to social action. Rather this epistemology holds that experiences of oppression are real and reflect the influence of dominant, unjust social and political value systems (Bohan, 1993).

Finally, one of the most distinctive aspects of feminist social constructionist epistemology is its theory of gender as a verb. Feminist social constructionists view gender as something that is performed and this performance can change over time periods and contexts, particularly in relation to shifting social and power relations between men and women (Sinacore & Enns, 2005). The notion that being male or female is inherently connected to being masculine or feminine is a social construction-- a concept that was created by societies and the power structures therein. As men have historically been socially dominant, they have largely determined what is "natural" behaviour for the different sexes. Moreover, the characteristics tied to masculinity are generally favored over those associated with femininity. Yet as power relations between men and women have changed, so have ideas about masculinity and femininity. Thus masculine and feminine identities are not natural, universal and static but nurtured and fluid, and transforming over time. Additionally, other social identities such as sexual orientation, race, class, and culture are also perceived as unstable and shaped by changing contexts and social power dynamics (Sinacore & Enns, 2005). Therefore, feminist social constructionism facilitates a critical examination of identities that are marginalized and oppressed, elucidating how the subjugation of these identities is culturally-based and serve to maintain certain power structures.

The underlying principles of feminist social constructionist epistemology are highly conducive to a critical examination of the gender and sexually-focused bullying experience of young females. To begin, in line with FSC's emphasis on the co-construction of knowledge, gender and sexually-focused bullying experiences must be understood through the experiences of the myriad of participants involved. Gender and sexually-focused bullying is an inherently co-constructed, transactional process involving victims, bullies, reinforcers, assistants, bystanders,

and many others, all of whom play a role in giving meaning to this phenomenon. Yet of utmost pertinence to this study, the assumption of multiple realities allows the gender and sexually-focused bullying experiences of girls to be illuminated and appreciated as distinct and valuable contributions to the established knowledge base on bullying.

Beyond the notion of multiple realities and the co-construction of knowledge, the feminist social constructionist theorization of gender as a verb and its anti-oppressive stance are theoretically and politically well-suited to the study of the gender and sexually-focused bullying of girls. Firstly, FSC illuminates how gender and sexually-focused bullying is inherently related to the social construction of gender, in that failure to adhere to socially prescribed gendered behaviours can lead to victimization through bullying. In effect, FSC is complementary to the central purpose of this study, as it exposes gender and sexually-focused bullying as a powerful mechanism used to sustain the prevailing sexual and gender norms. Likewise, with its anti-oppressive position, FSC uncovers the veiled assumptions related to gender and sexuality that marginalize individuals such as young, female victims of gender and sexually-focused bullying. Overall, feminist social constructionist epistemology is highly conducive to the study of the gender and sexually-focused bullying of girls as it has the potential to challenge dominant ways of knowing, thereby creating space for social transformation to occur.

Methodology

While the extant research has provided a broad understanding of gender and sexually-focused bullying, a rich description of how girls uniquely experience this phenomenon is lacking. In order to contribute to the existing literature, a qualitative research design was used to examine how adolescent females experience gender and sexually-focused bullying. Consistent with the aims of this study, qualitative methods facilitate a description of people's lived

experiences and the meanings constructed from these experiences (Creswell, 2007; Polkinghorne, 2005). Qualitative methods are particularly suited to topics that are currently not well understood and require a more nuanced exploration (Morrow, 2007). The current investigation employed a hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative method of inquiry to shed light on the complexities that characterize adolescent females' experiences of gender and sexually-focused bullying.

Philosophical Considerations

In order to understand hermeneutic phenomenology as a method, it is important to discuss its philosophical roots. Phenomenology was originally developed by German philosopher Edmond Husserl for the purpose of studying people's lived experiences and the meaning that people make of their experiences (Hein & Austin, 2001; Laverty, 2003; Lock & Strong, 2010). Husserl theorized that individuals know and understand phenomena through the conscious mind, and that conscious experiences of phenomena are made up of essences or structures, which could be directly studied. According to Husserl, by setting aside or *bracketing* all presuppositions of a phenomenon, one can come to grasp the essence of it, that is, "the typical way in which a phenomenon presents itself in experience" (Polkinghorn, 1989, as cited in Hein & Austin, 2001, p. 4). Thus, Husserl's Phenomenology was created as a science of consciousness, which was slightly positivist in its aim of revealing the exact nature of lived experiences as they appear in consciousness (Hein & Austin, 2001; Laverty, 2003; Lock & Strong, 2010).

After the advent of Husserl's phenomenology, other forms of phenomenological philosophy were put forward. One such form, hermeneutic phenomenology, was developed by the German philosophers Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer. While hermeneutic phenomenology and phenomenology both aim to understand human experience as it is lived, the

two approaches have clear distinctions in their underlying assumptions. Whereas a fundamental assumption underlying Husserl's work was that it is possible to grasp the essences of phenomena through bracketing, Heidegger took a more constructivist stance in his assumption that phenomena cannot be directly attained, only *interpreted*. Heidegger emphasized that as part of the human condition, people are embedded in pre-existing cultural structures, such as history and language, which serve as a basis upon which to understand phenomena. Heidegger argued that people cannot fully separate themselves from their social locations, but rather can only try to account for the contextual factors that influence their understandings of the world (Laverty, 2003). Thus according to Heidegger, a "pure" view of phenomena which transcends contextual influences is unattainable; only *interpretations* of the world can be made. Therefore, Heidegger envisioned hermeneutic phenomenology as a means of obtaining "interpretive understandings of existence in the world" (Hein & Austin, 2001 p. 5), which account for the social, political, and historical forces that influence interpretive processes.

With his focus on contextualization and subjectivity as inherent to human existence, Heidegger eschews Husserl's notion that researchers can or should *bracket* their assumptions when engaging with the phenomenon under study. Instead, Heidegger suggests that researchers are steeped in their own history, and are thus subjective. Therefore, as proposed by Heidegger, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach requires researchers to continuously reflect upon their biases and assumptions, and to openly discuss the ways in which their experiences or beliefs intersect with the phenomenon under investigation (Hein & Austin, 2001; Laverty, 2003). Thus, as opposed to gaining understanding of phenomena through *bracketing*, hermeneutic researchers gain understanding through the *fusion of horizons*, a concept put forward by Hans-Georg Gadamer (1976).

Gadamer conceived of *horizon* as "a range of vision" (Laverty, 2003 p. 10) that is held by individuals based on their particular social locations. Gadamer theorized that through dialogue, people could come to understand different traditions and ways of living, helping them to see beyond their own cultural embeddedness so that a fusion of horizons could be achieved (Lock & Strong, 2010). Thus, within hermeneutic phenomenology, researchers engage in dialogue with their participants, thereby co-constructing the data and coming to a *fusion of horizons*.

In the context of the current study, it is evident that the philosophical bases underlying hermeneutic phenomenology correspond well with a feminist social constructionist epistemological framework. Just as feminist social constructionist principles maintain that all individuals construct their own notions of reality, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach emphasizes that humans are situated knowers who make meaning of phenomena through their linguistic, historical, and cultural positions. Thus, feminist social constructionism (FSC) and hermeneutic phenomenology both adopt an interpretivist view of reality. Not only do FSC and hermeneutic phenomenology mutually highlight human subjectivity, these approaches correspondingly share similar values regarding the role of the researcher as an integral, but inevitably biased contributor to the research process. An additional commonality between hermeneutic phenomenology and FSC is that both aim to examine the common-place, taken for granted aspects of experience that influence meaning-making processes. Lastly, the feminist social constructionist anti-oppressive stance is well-supported by hermeneutic phenomenology, as this method has the capacity to provide contextualized understandings of the experiences of marginalized groups whose voices may otherwise be silenced. Given their overall compatibility, the application of a hermeneutic phenomenological method in conjunction with a feminist social

constructionist epistemology created a solid foundation upon which to study the gender and sexually-focused bullying experiences of young females.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Hermeneutic phenomenology allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of people's lived realities, which could include the gender and sexually-focused bullying experiences of adolescent girls. The purpose of hermeneutic phenomenological research is to develop a rich, detailed account of the lived experiences of a specific phenomenon. Hermeneutic phenomenology aims to uncover and make meaning of day-to-day experiences that may be taken for granted, thereby arriving at a greater understanding of those experiences (Creswell, 2007).

There are six elements that are said to be fundamental to hermeneutic phenomenological research: (a) *turning to a phenomenon of interest*; (b) *investigating lived experiences*; (c) *reflecting on essential themes*; (d) *describing the phenomenon through writing and rewriting*; (e) *maintaining a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon*; and (f) *balancing the research context by considering the parts and the whole* (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Van Manen, 1997).

The first element, *turning to a phenomenon of interest*, refers to the researcher intentionally directing their attention to a phenomenon that is of great concern to them and making a commitment to thoroughly question and understand that phenomenon. The second element is *investigating lived experience*, which involves examining a particular human experience without taking basic aspects of that experience for granted. The third element, *reflecting on essential themes*, pertains to the researcher's task of moving beyond the facts that describe an experience of a phenomenon, focusing instead on the themes that construct its essential meaning. The fourth element, *describing the phenomena through writing and re-*

writing, is the process of documenting, interpreting, and sharing the meaning of lived experience through language and text. The fifth element, *maintaining a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon*, refers to the researcher's challenge of remaining committed to exploring the phenomenon itself, without resorting to pre-existing taxonomies and heuristics as a means of understanding how the phenomenon is experienced. Finally, *balancing the research context by considering the parts and the whole*, describes the researcher's responsibility to remain cognizant of the big picture. In other words, researchers must avoid getting overwhelmed in the details of the data, such that they fail to examine how the data can be understood in light of the research design, paradigm, and questions (Van Manen, 1997; Smith et al., 2009).

Researcher Subjective Stance

The methodological process of hermeneutic phenomenology is informed by its philosophical underpinnings. As explicated by the philosophizing of Heidegger and Gadamer, hermeneutic phenomenological research is interpretive, examining the ways in which individuals interpret their experiences of events based on their social, historical, and linguistic contexts. Correspondingly, the researcher is viewed as an interpreter of the data whose social location and resultant assumptions and biases must also be considered. Thus, the researcher must openly and critically examine how their life experiences relate to the phenomenon under investigation, and this must be done continuously throughout the course of the inquiry (Laverty, 2003). Therefore, in the context of the current hermeneutic phenomenological study, a discussion of my personal background and values is warranted.

I am a 32 year old, white, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle-class, Jewish woman who is pursuing a doctoral degree in counselling psychology. In addition to these salient identities, I have been influenced by my family of origin; a family wherein the members are of diverse

sexual orientations and have varied modes of gender expression. In light of my familial background, sexual and gender diversity has always been part of my reality and integral to my concept of what is "normal". Nevertheless, I became aware at a young age of the negative societal attitudes that are held towards sexual and gender minorities. As early as nine years old I can recall hearing homophobic epithets being used among my peers. Consequently, I developed early in life an awareness of the level of openness to sexual diversity in various contexts, as well as whether and with whom I could be "out" regarding the sexual diversity within my family. I continued to carry this sense of caution with me into my adolescent years, which was a formative experience that aroused my interest in LGBTQ issues. Therefore, the values, beliefs, and pre-conceived notions I hold intrinsically informed by my life circumstances-- particularly, the experience of feeling simultaneously an insider and an outsider within the privileged world of heterosexuality.

Participants

Purposive selection of the participants was utilized in order to ensure that the sample obtained would provide information-rich descriptions of the phenomena under investigation. Purposive sampling refers to the intentional recruitment of individuals based on their ability to illuminate the central issues being addressed in a study (i.e., the gender and sexually-focused bullying of adolescent girls). The employment of purposive sampling is consistent with the aims of hermeneutic phenomenology, which seeks to gather detailed accounts of phenomena as they are experienced by individuals (Smith, et al., 2009). The aim of the recruitment process was to obtain 10 participants, as 8 – 15 participants is considered a satisfactory number for qualitative research (Hill et al., 2005). For the purpose of the present study, young women between 18 and 24 years of age who experienced gender or sexually-focused bullying more than once during

secondary school (i.e., between seventh and twelfth grade) were recruited. The term *secondary school* was employed to avoid the potential confusion that could have occurred as a result of the differences in secondary school structures across provinces and states. *Secondary school* clearly refers to post-elementary school education, and this term provided more clarity to the recruitment criteria.

By interviewing 18 – 24 year old women, retrospective accounts of gender and sexually-focused bullying were collected. The use of retrospective accounts is consistent with an underlying assumption of hermeneutic phenomenology, namely, that experience cannot be directly grasped, only interpreted. Using hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher seeks to understand how individuals derive meaning from or *interpret* lived experiences. However, such experiences come to be understood through engaging in a process of reflection, and it is difficult to fully reflect on an experience while in the midst of living it (Van Manen, 1997). According to Van Manen (1995), when contemplating the present moment, it is difficult to move beyond reflection of the task at hand to consider "the full range of possibilities of interpreting what is going on, understanding the various possible modalities of meaning, considering alternative courses of action, weighing their various consequences, deciding what must be done, and then actually doing it" (Van Manen, 1995, p. 35). In other words, in order to thoroughly reflect on a phenomenon and interpret it's meaning, some distance from the experience is necessary.

In contrast to the view of Van Manen (1995) which supports the use of retrospective research, retrospective research designs are widely criticized due to the fact that participants may not accurately remember the details of their past experiences (Elmes, Kantowitz, & Roediger, 2011). However, the aim of hermeneutic phenomenology is not to obtain objective facts about a phenomenon, but understanding the subjective meanings that individuals derive from a

phenomenon. Therefore, retrospective research is well-suited to a hermeneutic phenomenological method, as it allows for the illumination of the subjective meanings that people make of their experiences.

An additional rationale for using retrospective accounts of gender and sexually –focused bullying is related to the minimization of risk for participants. Adolescents who are attending secondary school have limited independence and must often account for their whereabouts to authority figures. Thus, in order to schedule interviews with secondary school students, there is a greater likelihood that they must reveal sensitive information to their parents, guardians, or teachers regarding their motivations for participating in this study; information that they may not wish to, or be ready to share. Therefore, in an effort to limit the risk of negatively affecting the participants' right to privacy, young adult females who were at least 18 years old and who completed secondary school were interviewed.

Participants were recruited in a large metropolitan city through advertisements posted in on-line forums (e.g., Craig's List), as well as through word of mouth (See Appendix A). As compensation for taking part in the study, participants were offered a fifteen dollar gift certificate.

Participant demographics. As a result of the recruitment process, 13 young women participated in the study who ranged in age from 18 to 22 years old. Ten of the participants were White, two of the participants were Asian, and one participant identified as mixed race. Six of the participants identified as heterosexual, five of the participants identified as bisexual, and two identified as lesbian. With regard to nationality, ten of the participants were Canadian, two were American, and one identified as having both Swiss and Dutch national affiliations. With the exception of one participant who completed her secondary school education in the United

Kingdom, the participants attended secondary school in the countries of their national affiliation. All of the participants were completing a university degree at a Canadian university.

Materials

The materials employed in this study included an informed consent form, a contact information form, a demographics information form, and a semi-structured interview protocol. All materials were constructed in conjunction with the researcher's doctoral supervisor and were subject to evaluation and approval by the Review Ethics Board which adheres to the Tri-council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Human Participants.

Informed consent form. An informed consent form (See Appendix B) was utilized to ensure that the participants were fully aware of their rights, the limits of confidentiality, and how the data collected from the study would be used. The informed consent form explained the aims of the study, how the data would be gathered, participants' rights regarding withdrawal from the study, how participants' confidentiality would be safeguarded, and any known risks associated with involvement in the study. Once participants were in agreement with the stipulations therein, they signed two copies of the form, one for the researcher's records, and one that they kept.

Contact information form. A contact information form was employed to obtain participants' home address, email address, and phone number (see Appendix C). Participants were offered the option of being contacted in the future regarding the results of the study. In order to maintain the participants' anonymity, the contact information form was stored separately from the other forms.

Demographics information form. Participants were asked to complete a demographics questionnaire (see Appendix D). The demographics form requested information regarding age, gender, sexual orientation, family structure, ethnicity, nationality, religious affiliation, spoken

languages, relationship status, and level of education. The demographics questionnaire also asked participants to provide details pertaining to the secondary school(s) they attended, including the province/state where the school was located, the type of environment in which the school was situated (e.g., rural/urban/suburban), whether it was a public or private institution, whether it was a single-sex or a co-ed school, whether the school was religiously affiliated, and whether the school offered resources for LGBTQ youth and allies. Information from the demographics form facilitated the hermeneutic phenomenological analysis by offering a greater understanding of the specific contexts within which the participants' lived experiences with gender and sexually focused bullying occurred.

Interview protocol. In order to address the research questions posed in the study, while still giving the participants space to express the words and experiences that are pivotal to them, a semi-structured interview protocol was used (See Appendix E). The semi-structured interview protocol consisted of a set of questions that served to guide the conversations with the participants. Broadly, participants were asked to consider and reflect upon their experiences with bullying.

Procedures

Ethics. The proposed research project was submitted for an ethics review by the Review Ethics Board of the Faculty of Education at McGill University (See Appendix F). Once ethics approval was obtained, young women who met the recruitment criteria and were interested in taking part in the study were invited to contact the researcher at McGill University by telephone or email. Once contact was made with a participant, a meeting time for an interview was scheduled. Interviews were conducted at the participants' convenience at McGill University.

Prior to commencing the interview process, the researcher explained the goals of the study and any potential risks involved, following which the participant read and signed the consent form.

All data collected from this research project was stored under lock and key in a secured location. Specifically, the audio recorded interviews, the transcribed hard copies of the interviews, and the computer files of the transcriptions were stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's private office. Other materials such as the consent, demographics, and contact information forms were also kept in a separate, locked filing cabinet at the same location. To protect the participants' anonymity, the demographics information forms and the transcribed interviews contained no identifying information. Instead the forms were coded with numbers. Once the study is complete, the audio recorded interviews were erased.

Data collection. Following the signing of the informed consent form, participants were asked to complete the demographics questionnaire and the contact information form. Subsequently, the researcher conducted the interview using the interview protocol that was designed for this study. The interview sessions were audio recorded and the data was transcribed and coded.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed in accordance with Smith Flowers and Larkin's (2009) Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach. Consistent with the feminist social constructionist epistemological framework of this study, which emphasizes how individuals interpret the world in distinct ways, IPA similarly aims to explore how participants make meaning of particular experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Data analysis began with reading a transcribed interview multiple times to become familiar with the participant's account. During these initial readings, the researcher took notes on any aspects of the transcript that stood out as "interesting or

significant" (Smith & Osborn, 2008 p. 67). In so doing, the researcher also noted the participants' use of language, repetitions of words or ideas, issues or experiences that were emphasized, and similarities or contradictions in what was said. (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Once the initial process of reading the transcript and identifying areas of importance was completed, the researcher read through the entire transcript again to identify focus points. Subsequently, a judge reviewed the focus points that were identified by the researcher to ensure that they were grounded in the transcript. If the judge disagreed on the accuracy of any of the focus points, they discussed it with the researcher until a consensus was reached. Subsequently, a table was created that listed each focus point with the corresponding line numbers from the transcribed interview. Next, the researcher reviewed all of the focus points to examine their relationship to one another. Focus points that constructed the essence of the individuals' experience were joined to create a theme, and then statements from the transcript that illuminated each theme were entered into a data chart.

Once the analytic process was conducted for all of the participants, the researcher looked for patterns across transcripts. Similar and divergent meaning categories that emerged across transcripts were examined, and finally, a description of the phenomenon of the gender and sexually-focused bullying experiences of young women was written that discusses these similarities and differences (Smith et al., 2009; Van Manen, 1997).

Although the IPA process appears to be linear, it is truly iterative in that it is necessary to continuously verify one's own interpretation of the participants' experiences against the participant's actual statements (Smith et al., 2009; Van Manen, 1997). By keeping detailed records, the researcher was able to trace an identified theme back to the statements in the

transcript from which it arose, which allowed her to reflect upon her own interpretations of the data throughout the analytic process and to make corrections when needed.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

An important aspect of qualitative inquiry in general is its dedication to trustworthiness and credibility, a commitment to ensuring rigour in the research process. Techniques that were employed to maintain trustworthiness in this study include: sensitivity to context, accuracy, reflexivity, verification, dependability, and catalytic validity (Lather, 2003; Smith, et al., 2009).

Sensitivity to Context

One way of maintaining trustworthiness and credibility in qualitative research is by revealing the contextual basis upon which participants derived meaning from their experiences. In this study, context was taken into account by explicitly discussing the sociocultural factors that were pertinent to the participants' experiences, as well as to the undertaking of the study itself. By remaining sensitive to context, the researcher not only obtained more multifaceted understandings of the participants' experiences, but also revealed the contextual factors that affected the data, thereby increasing the study's overall credibility (Smith et al., 2009). Furthermore, a thorough discussion of contextual factors was important, as it revealed the transferability of the findings, that is, the extent to which the findings from this study can be compared with other studies. Therefore, the focus on contextual factors in this study served to maintain trustworthiness and credibility. The endeavor to remain sensitive to contextual issues was facilitated by this study's epistemological framework, which similarly requires researchers to attend to the social environments in which personal meanings are constructed (Sprague, 2005).

Reflexivity

Within qualitative inquiry, it is acknowledged that researchers are influenced by their own assumptions. Moreover, when conducting research through a feminist social constructionist lens, the themes that emerge from the data are considered to be co-constructed by the researcher and the participants. Therefore, researchers are implored to engage in reflexivity, that is, to (Morrow, 2005). In the context of the current study, a reflexive process was put in place through journaling. A journal was used by the researcher throughout the investigation in order to document salient experiences in the research process, reactions, and awareness of the surfacing of held assumptions. Additionally, ongoing dialogues took place with the researcher's dissertation supervisor regarding the meaning categories identified in the data.

Verification

Another method through which trustworthiness was achieved was through verification. To employ verification, a judge initially reviewed the meaning categories identified by the researcher in each transcript. Subsequently, an auditor reviewed the researcher's interpretations to ensure that the conclusions derived from the data were sound and that no other relevant understandings were overlooked (Creswell, 2007). In the context of the current study, the researcher's dissertation supervisor served as an auditor who examined the conclusions drawn after analyzing the data across transcripts. The researcher's dissertation supervisor is a female, associate professor in Counselling Psychology whose scholarship has focused on multicultural issues and the experiences of diverse populations. She has extensively researched topics such as cultural transitioning of immigrant populations, LGBTQ families, and gender based violence and bullying. Her expertise also extends to feminist and social justice theories and practice, as well

as qualitative methods of inquiry. Verifying the data analysis through the use of a judge and auditor strengthened the trustworthiness and credibility of this study.

Dependability

In order to ensure the trustworthiness of a study, it should meet the criterion of dependability. In other words, the process through which the data was analyzed and conclusions were drawn should be made clear and comprehensible. Dependability is achieved by keeping systematic, detailed records of the research activities, including, the order in which the research activities were conducted, the process through which themes and meaning categories emerged, and any influences on the data collections or analysis (Morrow, 2005; Shenton, 2004). By keeping an audit trail that can be examined by others, the researcher maintained a transparent stance toward the research and provided readers with insight into how the analytic process unfolded and the results were obtained, thereby enhancing the trustworthiness of the study.

Catalytic Validity

Catalytic validity refers to the ability of the research to empower research participants (Lather, 2003). Catalytic validity raises the issue of how the research process helps participants to know the world in ways that facilitates their ability to transform it for emancipatory purposes (Koro-Ljungberg, 2008). In order to achieve catalytic validity, one of the research questions posed investigated what young women who experienced gender or sexually-focused bullying as adolescents believe should be done to help other female adolescents who find themselves in similar situations. In so doing, this study oriented the participants to consider possible ways in which adolescent females who are experiencing gender or sexually-focused bullying can be supported. This study also suggested some practical ways that this form of oppression can be diminished.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

As the findings of this study will demonstrate, the participants constructed a complex picture of bullying as a phenomenon that affected multiple areas of their lives and that was influenced by their particular life contexts. Specifically, the participants emphasized the following topic areas in the accounts they shared: (a) the climate of their secondary schools, (b) their experiences of gender and sexually-focused bullying, (c) their immediate responses to the bullying, (d) the influence of the bullying on their school experiences, (e) the psychosocial effects of the bullying, (f) the influence of the bullying on their values and understanding of society, and (g) how they coped with the bullying. The results of this study will be organized by these aforementioned topic areas, and each will be discussed in detail.

Secondary School Climate

Participants reported that certain aspects of their school contexts influenced the bullying they experienced. Specifically, participants expressed that the lack of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity among the students in their schools, as well as the values and attitudes of conservatism, conformity to rigid gender norms, inequality between the sexes, and homophobia that were held by their peers and the school staff created a climate wherein bullying was inadvertently fostered.

Lack of diversity. Several participants described their school populations as homogeneous in terms of their racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. For example, regarding the lack of racial diversity in her public secondary school, one White participant stated,

> Our town is very White-washed… There was a lottery system where kids would get sent into our public schools from a neighbouring town which is like all Black and you don't go there at night kind of thing… but people were not very accepting of them... and they tended to stick with each other... they weren't really well integrated into our school.

Correspondingly, certain participants noted that racial and ethnic minority students who attended their schools were bullied. For example, a White participant who attended public secondary school reported, "I mean there was one Black kid in our high school… he had a pretty rough time with everyone just stereotyping and saying horrible things to him all the time."

Additionally, although the participants came from families representing a range of socioeconomic statuses, several reported that their schools were populated by students from economically privileged backgrounds. For example, a participant stated, "I mean there was a lot of wealthy people [in my school] and that was standard and kind of looked up to… the type of people I went to school with owned like $400 jeans."

The participants also identified that they went through elementary and secondary school with many of the same people. They felt that interacting with many of the same students since childhood, as well as the uniformity in backgrounds of their peers led them to be largely unaware of cultural diversity and ways of living that were different from their own. Regarding both the lack of awareness of diversity and different ways of living, a participant stated,

> We'd all grown up together, the same 24 kids our entire lives and we were all very closed off just as far as experiencing [only] what we're used to. We all came from wealthier families and we'd all grown up doing the exact same thing so we'd never been opened to other kinds of lifestyles.

Thus, participants perceived that their classmates came from privileged backgrounds, that they tended to follow a certain traditional life path and that consequently they were unaware of and had little openness to cultural diversity. Moreover, participants believed that attending school within such a homogeneous social context created an environment in which students who differed in any way from their peers were likely to stand out or be judged negatively due to their divergence. Accordingly, a participant who attended public secondary school stated,

> People [in my town] weren't exposed to a great diversity of things, and especially when there wasn't the internet or any kind of social media to give you a gateway into other cultures, other regions of the world, the country... There's a spike in the in-group/out-group bias, where people formed cliques and if you were a part of the clique great, everything is well and dandy, and if you aren't well then there's something profoundly wrong with you. And if there isn't something profoundly wrong with you they'll make something up that's profoundly wrong with you and say it enough times that it doesn't even matter if it's true or not.

Not only did the homogeneity of the participants' schools mean that students who were different stood out, but it created a climate where it felt unsafe to deviate from the expected norms.

Values and attitudes. In addition to the lack of diversity, participants reported that the values and attitudes that were implicitly held by their peers and school staff negatively influenced the climate of their schools. Values discussed by participants included, conservatism, conformity to rigid gender norms, inequality between the sexes, and homophobia. Regarding conservatism, participants reported that their schools did not tolerate behavior from students or staff that was perceived as out of the ordinary or that went against traditional conventions. For example, a participant who attended a private religious school reported that conservatism was supported by school staff and students, to the extent that teachers who failed to exemplify the expected level of conservatism were disparaged by students and colleagues. As she stated, "[The school was] generally very conservative… There were one or two teachers that were considered more free spirited and they were seen as clown-ish figures… they were made fun of... they were seen as a joke."

Participants also mentioned conformity to rigid gender norms as a value that was implicitly held in their schools. To this end, a participant who attended an all-girls private school reported that her secondary school only appreciated students who conformed to a specific mold, one which aligned with traditional, rigid gender norms for femininity,

> The image [the school] tries to project is one of "We breed strong, successful, independent women." And I'm sure to a certain degree they do, but underneath it all it was you conform to this idealized notion. And to the image that we want to present to the outside world and if you don't well, we're not going to sweep you under the rug, but we're not going to devote any time or resources to you. So I think the image that they want to project is ultimately the one that was cultivated, which is that of the quote/unquote 'cliquey' girl…

Another participant described the rigid gender norms she recognized in her public junior high school. She explained that she gained greater awareness of the rigid gender norms in her school after experiencing unwanted sexual touching by boys in one of her classes and then being blamed for it by her female friends. As she stated,

> I guess it would have just been really strict gender norms [that contributed to the bullying]… actually sometimes it was worse from girls, when instead of being sympathetic, a friend in junior high said, oh [participant's name] is such a skank… yah if I told certain people about [being groped by the boys]… the really religious ones among them would assume that I asked for it in some way... That was the sort of conservative narrative they'd absorbed… that these things only happen to women who deserve it.

This participant experienced her junior high school as a place where meeting traditional expectations of femininity for girls, such as maintaining sexual abstinence and an image of innocence, was valued. The inappropriate touching that she was subjected to highlighted her sexuality in the eyes of her peers, did not fit with the rigid gender expectations held for girls in her school, and was perceived by her peers to be something that she solicited and therefore her fault. She subsequently realized that in her school, failing to conform to rigid gender norms was grounds for being ridiculed and blamed by peers.

Further, participants discussed the inequality between the sexes that was present in their schools. For example, a participant stated,

> There were a couple of girls in my class that just thought it was so funny and that the social differentiations between the genders were obsolete… and there were… probably 10 of us who just hated it and were really uncomfortable… I think the girls were a lot more reserved and kind of suck-up-y to the teachers and the teachers wouldn't really

> respond to it, whereas the guys would be the more outspoken ones who always got kicked out of class.

Similarly, another participant reported,

> The guys were very domineering in that school... and the girls just played into that... they would let the boys be dominant... like typical Barbie girl kind of thing. You know that thing where you think they are acting stupid on purpose [because they] don't really say much and just giggle. And when you talk to them one on one you know they are perfectly smart people who can articulate their thoughts properly. Then you just put a boy somewhere in the vicinity and all of a sudden they are giggling and like pulling up their skirts a little bit...Yeah that was a very common dynamic…

Participants recalled that the dynamic between girls and boys in their schools was inequitable in that boys tended to be higher in the social hierarchy of students, and some participants reported that the boys garnered more attention from the school staff than did girls. Although participants reported feeling uncomfortable about the way in which boys and girls interacted in their schools and how they were differentially treated by staff, they also recalled that some of their female peers supported the boys' dominance by minimizing their intelligence and shifting their appearance to please the boys.

Additionally, participants reported that people in their schools often devalued sexual diversity and were hostile to LGB students. A lesbian participant who was not out about her sexual orientation in secondary school reported,

> [My school] had their token gestures. Like there was a Gay Straight Alliance except… I just wouldn't have felt comfortable going to something like that. Because again [name of participant's home province] isn't exactly the friendliest place to be [for LGBTQ individuals]… The attitudes weren't always so welcoming...

Another participant recalled how some of her teachers at school expressed anti-LGBTQ attitudes. In this regard, the participant stated,

> One time in my French class we had a debate and so me and someone else chose gay marriage as our topic… And so we debated and the person arguing against it won even though his side of the debate was super poorly articulated… he kept being like, "It's

> gross though" and the teacher was like "Yes, yes it is" even though we had a super well researched, really intense argument for our side.

While certain participants believed that negative attitudes toward LGBTQ individuals in their schools were a product of the homophobia that pervaded the region in which they lived, others focused on how homophobic attitudes were explicitly condoned by their school's authority figures. In both scenarios, a school climate was fostered that was not safe for LGBTQ students.

Not only did teachers indirectly support bullying in the schools through the values and attitudes they conveyed, they also contributed to bullying by targeting students directly. Participants reported that their teachers bullied them due to their academic success or difficulty in athletics, which resulted in them feeling uncomfortable and singled out among their peers. For instance, one participant described how her teacher joined her peers in bullying her for winning a university scholarship. As she stated,

> People [were] talking about me behind my back… even a teacher in the leadership program, like I stopped showing up to meetings because it was not a nice experience to go and have my peers all be whispering or saying "oh its [participant's name] again, she's like big city why is she even here, why does she even come to school anymore she's already got her scholarship, why doesn't she just leave?" So I stopped going to meetings and instead of asking why I'd stopped going to meetings, the teacher just said "so do you plan on coming to anymore leadership meetings, or are you too good for us now?" That was the email I got from him.

Bullying by a teacher was also discussed by another participant. This participant, who described struggling in sports due to her weight, discussed how she was singled out by her gym teacher and excluded from class activities. As she reported,

> Instead of like letting me play sports, because I couldn't run a mile in less than…what was it…12 minutes . . . [the gym teacher] just made me run all of PE . . . I ran the entire PE class. That was like 4 months.

Bullying by school personnel was also targeted at sexual orientation. For instance, a lesbian participant reported that an administrator from her junior high school revealed her lesbian sexual orientation to her parents without her knowledge or permission. As she recalled,

> [The school administration] called my parents because… I had a girlfriend and…it's not like we were kissing in school or being really sexual but we would hold hands and stuff… [the] keyword was "It's a distraction" which is what school administration types love to use…I know this comes up a lot for other kids who've been bullied… their sexuality's seen as a distraction to other students because it creates a problem… so I felt like I was just being blamed for other kids harassing me. And they called my parents. I don't know what the conversation was in particular. I think I was out to my mom at that point but then I had to tell my dad and it was really not fun… I don't know how my life would have been different if I hadn't been forced to come out to them at that early age. In some ways it's a blessing because I got that over with... [I was] 13… it was really intense though. I was definitely not… ready. It was just like ripping a band-aid off.

In directly perpetrating bullying toward students, teachers and administrators endorsed and modeled discrimination toward girls based on academic success, size, and sexual orientation. In essence, these authority figures reinforced the notion that failing to fit into a particular mold for female students was unacceptable and deserved to be punished.

Overall, the lack of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity among the student population in the participants' schools, and the hostile and discriminatory behaviour toward minority students indicated to participants that it was unsafe to be different from their fellow students. Additionally, the attitudes and values endorsed by the participants' peers, teachers, and administrators fostered a school climate in which obtaining acceptance, appreciation, or respect was contingent upon the extent to which one conformed to certain traditional norms, especially with regard to gender expression and sexual orientation. Within these school climates, students were expected to maintain a high level of conservatism, conform to traditional femininity, accept male dominance, and identify as heterosexual.

Gender and Sexually-Focused Bullying in Secondary School

The results of this study revealed that the bullying targeted at participants was concentrated on three main areas: (a) gender norms for appearance and behavior, (b) sexual orientation, and (c) dating and perceived sexual activity. In other words, the participants reported that they were bullied by their peers for being too masculine or feminine, for having a neutral gender presentation, for openly identifying as bisexual or lesbian, or for the presumption of being lesbian. They were also bullied for dating too much or too little, as well as for engaging in sexual activity or for being seen as sexually active.

Moreover, given the interactions between gender and sexual orientation, for the remainder of this discussion, the participants will be identified according to how they reported their own gender and sexual identities. By identifying the participants in this way, a clearer, more nuanced picture of the participants' lived experiences of bullying in secondary school will be offered.

Gender norms for appearance and behavior

Many participants reported that they were bullied due to the fact that their gender expression did not align with societal expectations for individuals whose biological sex is female. That is, participants whose appearance was not stereotypically feminine, who did not meet the feminine ideal of "attractiveness", or whose behavior was deemed unfeminine experienced bullying. As such, bullying focused on gender norms for appearance and behavior will be illuminated in this section.

Gender norms for appearance. Participants who experienced bullying that was focused on their appearance reported being made fun of for their weight, for being less physically developed than other girls, and for having bodily or facial features that were deemed unfeminine

or sexually unattractive. For example, one participant who was neutral gendered reported being insulted in her high school gym class about her weight, "We were playing soccer. So I tripped in front of them and then they missed the goal. And then they swore at me and said a lot of things about fat girls . . ." Another neutral gendered participant who attended a private school described her experiences of being targeted about her physical development, "Everyone would laugh at my… like tiny breasts a lot. And tell me that they were pointy and they were too small for a bra…" The same participant was also bullied about her appearance through the internet. As she stated,

> When I was in seventh grade everyone was making their own Pixo . . . It was just a web posting site . . . so everyone had these websites where they would have… stuff written about people and they would have a poll, 'Which of these girl is the hottest?' . . . so I was included in a 'Which of these girls is the hottest?' poll and it's blatantly a joke because there's always a few that are considered serious contenders and a few that are like, 'oh haha how clever we are! We put these people in here too!'

Further, participants reported being targeted with sexually-objectifying comments. For example, a feminine gendered participant made the following statement regarding verbal harassment she experienced from boys during gym class,

> Towards the end of grade eight and grade nine when all the girls would come in wearing our long basketball shorts and that kind of thing, all the guys would be like, 'Oh, why don't you just take that off?' And they would throw thongs at us… and be like, 'Can you wear this instead?' And just… that kind of, I guess female-specific targeting.

As illustrated in the above quotes, participants were bullied for various aspects of their appearance that their peers perceived as unattractive, and they were also bullied by being pressured to appear sexier. Moreover, oftentimes such bullying was done in a public and humiliating way.

Gender norms for behaviour. Participants were also bullied when their behavior did not conform to dominant standards for femininity. That is, they were bullied for acting too feminine

or not feminine enough. Participants reported being teased and receiving hurtful comments due to having interests/hobbies that were deemed unfeminine, dressing in unfeminine ways, and for being a high academic achiever. For example, a masculine gendered participant stated, "You know, my hobbies mostly involved making armour with my guy-friend and playing role-playing games with the boys and stuff. But I got called things like 'Butch' a lot . . .because I was not a girly-girl in the slightest." Another neutral gendered participant explained,

> I was just bad at being a girl in a proper way, in a way that was expected of me... I never straightened my hair and I didn't go tanning... I probably would have done those things if I'd had the money… it wasn't for any principled feminist stance that I wasn't looking like the other girls in high school, but, yah… I didn't look the right way, and I was dating too much, and I was achieving too much, and talking too much...

In addition to receiving verbal, harassment about style of dress, participants described incidents of their peers insulting them behind their backs, losing friends, and being ostracized when their behavior did not conform to traditional standards of femininity. That is, participants discussed being excluded from social events and ultimately growing apart from friends because their interests and/or behavior were not stereotypically feminine. For example, a neutral gendered reported,

> Looking back on it . . . I think I recognized how cool learning was and so that set me apart because everyone else was [into], you know, like boys and this birthday party and let's go to the mall. . . And it was a genuine disinterest [on my part]. . . those things weren't even important to me at all. . . [the girls] used it as a way of excluding you if you weren't into that...

Further, this participant was excluded from activities by her female friends because her interests and behaviors were not stereotypically feminine, and she reported that the internet was used to highlight this exclusion. As she explained,

> Some of it was outright comments like, 'You're not going to come with us', but then a lot of it was just not being included... I think at a certain point some of the girls [posted on] myspace like, 'these are my three best friends' and it was a purposeful exclusion... we were known at school for being friends so it was definitely an obvious, intentional thing.

While some participants reported being bullied for not being feminine, others experienced bullying for being too feminine. These participants reported that their male peers were unwelcoming toward them when it came to certain school activities, or excluded them altogether on the basis of their perceived femininity. For example, a feminine gendered participant stated, "A lot of sexually oriented things [were said] to me and a couple of my friends. They would basically try to degrade us all the time and if we were in group projects they wouldn't let us do things . . ."

Thus, regardless of gender expression, participants that did not conform to certain expected behaviors were bullied for either being too masculine, gender neutral, or too feminine. Furthermore the bullying was perpetrated verbally, relationally, physically and on the internet by both male and female peers at school.

Sexual orientation. Participants reported that their gender presentation was linked to how their peers perceived their sexual orientation. That is, heterosexual, bisexual, and lesbian participants were bullied at school because their peers assumed they were lesbian, and this was the case regardless of the participants' actual sexual orientation or, for sexual minority participants, if they were "out". The participants also revealed that their peers' presumption that they were lesbian was based solely on their masculine or neutral gender presentation. Further, the sexually-focused bullying targeted at participants took on a combination of forms, so at any given time participants could be simultaneously experiencing a range of bullying.

Participants reported having homophobic epithets and negative comments directed at them if they were actually bisexual or lesbian, or if their peers' presumed that they were lesbian. For example, a masculine gendered heterosexual participant stated, "I got called things like 'Butch' a lot" and she also reported, "A lot of [the bullying] was centred on the fact that I was

not interested in dating... and so, the main extensions from that were either like "Oh, you're just scared or you're hiding something, or you're a lesbian."

In addition to being targeted with homophobic epithets from peers, some participants received anonymous notes filled with homophobic insults or had their school lockers graffitied. As a masculine gendered lesbian participant stated, "Yeah someone graffitied my locker and they wrote 'dyke' on it and I was like… 'wow that's really intense'…" Similarly, one masculine gendered bisexual participant described an incident of bullying perpetrated by female peers in the locker room of the secondary school she attended. At the time of this bullying, she was not out to her school peers about her sexual orientation. As she stated,

> I came to my locker and there was this mocked-up vagina that was like 3-dimensional, made out of paper and foam core… it was stuck on my locker and a photo of me was in the vagina… And then they had written some slur related to that, like, 'box eater' in big letters over the top. And everyone was there already laughing at it…and everyone looked at me and you just want to go through the floor and be invisible and just hide… forever…

As shown in the above example, the sexually-focused bullying was hurtful, incessant, humiliating, and sometimes used to mark and stigmatize the participants.

Participants that were bullied for openly identifying as a sexual minority or for their peers' assumption that they were lesbian were also at risk for violence and dehumanization such as being publicly shamed, slandered, and abused by peers who shoved, chased, and prodded them. Such bullying was blatantly aggressive and often slyly executed so that it was less observable to authority figures. For instance, a masculine gendered heterosexual participant recalled an incident in which she was bullied at school by an older male student because he thought she was lesbian, and her male friend joined in,

> I was studying for finals one day [with] two really close friends…both male. . . and our third acquaintance came and was hanging out with us. And someone from the football team came over and, you know, the stereotypical . . . everyone's got to chum up to the football kid. And so our third acquaintance was apparently very influenced by that and

> just started ragging on me when the football player started [saying] "You must know all the Jewel songs because all lesbians do" or, "How many girls in school have you slept with?". . . And it escalated to the point where they. . . turned it into, as they said, a "lesbian petting zoo" and so they enjoyed feeding me crackers and telling me to open my mouth because I was a lesbian in a zoo that they could feed . . .

In the above example, the bullies assumed that the participant was lesbian and on the basis of that assumption, they compared her to a barn animal that they could pet. Such bullying was not only utterly debasing and cruel, it represented an invasion of her person and physical space leaving her humiliated and feeling vulnerable to further attack.

Other physically invasive and threatening bullying was less obvious to outside observers included having garbage thrown at them, as well as being repeatedly poked in the back, and shoved in such a way that it appeared to be an accident. Along the same lines, a masculine gendered lesbian participant described an incident of being bullied on the bus to school, as well as outdoors on school grounds. At the time that this incident occurred, she was not out as lesbian. As she stated,

> In grade 11 I was on the bus to school one day… I got on and I sat down and there were these three girls sitting across from me and they were just kind of staring at me and whispering and stuff. And then, I made eye contact with one of them, and she asked me "What the fuck are you looking at?" And I was like "I'm just sitting here." And then they kept doing it and then… they started following me off the bus. And they were yelling things at me. I think one of them called me a "dyke" or something. One of them called me a "fat bitch." And so I just started running. I didn't know what they were going to do. And I went down this alley somewhere and I hid there and called my mom and I was crying, and she had to come and pick me up and take me home, so I missed the morning of school because of that. That's the [experience of bullying] that stands out the most because that's the one time I was actually scared for myself…

As illustrated by these quotes, a number of participants were threatened and attacked by their peers because they were presumed to be lesbian, which was experienced as hostile and frightening.

Participants also described being socially stigmatized because they identified as lesbian or because their peers' assumed that they were lesbian, which lead them to feel uncomfortable and vulnerable at school. Specifically, they reported being directly confronted with comments from peers communicating that their presence in school was unwelcomed. For example, a masculine gendered bisexual participant stated, "Oh, [they said things] like 'stupid dyke,' 'go home,' 'go away,' 'nobody wants you,' 'you don't belong here,' 'go hangout with your girlfriend' I guess that kind of thing mostly".

Participant also reported losing friends, knowing that friends were talking about them behind their backs, and being made to feel unwelcome and uncomfortable in school. For example, a neutral gendered bisexual participant noted, "There was a lot of just obvious whispering… as in like the pantomiming of like, 'we are whispering about you.'" Participants also reported having an awareness that classmates were discussing them behind their backs and sensing that certain assumptions about their sexual orientation were widely held by peers. For example, a masculine gendered lesbian participant stated, "I knew there were people talking about me because… I think for grade eight, nine, ten I was probably the only gay kid that anyone knew. So I was like THE gay kid and people would talk about that." As the participant explained, she stood out as the token sexual minority student in her school and was the "hot topic" of discussion by her peers, which was highly distressing. Similarly, a masculine gendered heterosexual participant stated,

> [It was] just knowing that everybody assumed you were gay… And knowing that if your name was brought up people would say that kind of thing. Except for my handful of friends in middle school I knew that everybody disliked me and… the way that they labeled that dislike was saying "Oh, she's gay" . . .

As this participant explained, she was aware that her school peers talked negatively about her and assumed she was gay. Furthermore, she attributed her peers' behaviour to the fact that they

despised her for deviating from the expected norms among students by having a masculine gendered appearance and for having interests that were not stereotypically feminine.

As illustrated here, participants were bullied at school because they identified as lesbian or because their peers assumed they were lesbian. Namely, participants were targeted with homophobic epithets, messages, graffiti, physical threats and attacks, as well as social alienation and gossip. Although a couple of participants openly identified as sexual minorities, most of the bisexual and lesbian participants were not out about their sexual orientation during secondary school. Therefore, most of the participants were bullied for the presumption that they were lesbian, a presumption that was based on their masculine or neutral gender presentation. Further, for those participants who were sexual minorities, they were bullied for their actual sexual orientation whether they were out or not. Although all of the participants were left feeling unsafe and rejected in their schools as a result of the bullying, the significance and meaning of the bullying was different between heterosexual and sexual minority participants. That is, since heterosexual participants knew that their peers' assumptions that they were lesbian were false, they could deny being lesbian and attribute the bullying to other factors either internal or external to themselves. Although heterosexual participants were left feeling misunderstood and isolated as a result of the sexually-focused bullying, they could take solace in the fact that their peers' most supreme insult, that they were lesbian, was untrue. In contrast, participants who openly or secretly identified as sexual minorities were attacked for a genuine aspect of their identity which they could deny outwardly, but not inwardly, and something which they did not have power to change even if they so desired. Such bullying was also especially damaging to participants who were in the closet, as it only further solidified that their sexual orientation was deplorable to others and that being out at school was dangerous. Thus, the sexually-focused bullying toward

sexual minority participants was particularly hateful and hurtful as it meant that they were inherently unacceptable.

Dating and perceived sexual activity. Participants reported being bullied for their dating behaviors and for their peers' perception of their engagement in sexual activity. However, bullying that focused on these areas was experienced differently depending on how a participant's sexual orientation was perceived by others.

Heterosexual participants. Participants that identified as heterosexual, or who were perceived to be heterosexual by their secondary school peers, were bullied for reasons such as (a) dating many boys, (b) the presumption that they were having sex with multiple boys, or (c) the assertion that they were uninterested in dating. A neutral gendered participant who identifies as bisexual but was presumed by peers to be heterosexual described how she was insulted by female friends because she was dating a few different boys and because they assumed she was sexually active,

> I think the ones that stand out for me are the slut shaming experiences . . . just based on the perception that I was like having sex with a lot of people . . . at the time I'd still absorbed a lot of Christian values about not having sex before marriage and everything, and I was really trying to keep it together in that way. But I do remember a lot of backlash in particular from girls just because I dated a lot of guys . . . just finding out things that were said about me or things that were assumed about me. Mostly just words like slut, whore, bitch those kinds of things . . . And it would mostly be from close friends that I would find out that these things are being said.

Alternatively, a masculine gendered heterosexual participant reported,

> Generally [the bullies said], like, "Oh well like she's gay" and, "you don't even like boys, do you?" kind of thing. . . honestly a lot of it did revolve around sexuality, which I was always kind of amazed by because I was just the most boy-crazed from like age 6. . . I've never questioned my own sexuality, even in the face of everybody saying that because I was always like, "No, I'm literally in love with half the guys in this room."

Heterosexual participants also discussed being teased about their friendships with certain male students at school in a manner that insinuated a sexual or romantic interest between them,

leading them to feel extremely uncomfortable. For instance, a feminine gendered heterosexual participant who attended a private school discussed the verbal harassment she received from male peers at school when one of her male classmates became her stepbrother after her father remarried,

> In grade 8, my dad and my stepmom got married, and my stepmom's son was in my class… And it was kind of a big thing in my class. Like, "oh my God you're living with your stepbrother and he really likes you"… the guys [in my grade] would make comments and stick love notes in my locker from him…. that said just weird, inappropriate things like… "can't wait until you get home tonight, baby. I miss you so."

Another masculine gendered heterosexual participant who was verbally bullied in junior high by both male and female peers stated,

> One of my friends was a guy . . . but we tended to not hang out very much just because there would be so much like "Oh, you guys are dating. Oh my goodness" and people trying to push us together. . . so that would make him really uncomfortable. It would make me really uncomfortable. So at school we just stayed away from each other.

In addition to being verbally harassed, participants who identified as heterosexual or were perceived to be heterosexual reported being excluded from activities or being ostracized among their social groups because of a disinterest in heterosexual dating. For example, a neutral gendered heterosexual participant discussed how she was excluded from activities by her closest female friends due to not sharing their interest in boys and dating. As stated by this participant,

> I remember Halloween trick-or-treating . . . we were going to go with boys . . . and my friends were like, "Do you really want to go? You're not really into it," and it was kind of nice of them, but at the same time I think they were just hinting that I didn't have any relationships with boys... So in hindsight that was nice, but not. But things like that where you're expected at that point to pair up or to have a crush on this person or go dance with this person and then if you don't. . . it separates you a little bit.

These participants also discussed how classmates made assumptions and gossiped about their sex lives and their dating behaviors behind their backs. For example, a neutral gendered bisexual participant who was perceived by her peers to be heterosexual in secondary school reported,

> It would just be girls getting really angry at me if I dated the guy that they wanted to date. I had a few incidences of that where I ended up dating someone and then I told someone about it, and then I would hear later that they thought I was a colossal bitch for telling them I was dating this person because they really liked this person. [I would hear about it from] friends basically. Really, in those spaces where everything is supposed to be homogenous I guess gossip is the number one tool that people use to bring each other down. Because they know it's going to get back to you with that grape vine effect so if you say something in that little train you know it's going to get back and hurt the person.

As illustrated in the above quotes, participants who were heterosexual or perceived to be heterosexual were often placed in a double bind situation wherein some were bullied if they seemed uninterested in dating and sexual activity, while others were looked down upon and disparaged by their peers for their actual dating and sexual behaviors how their peers perceived their involvement in such activities.

Lesbian and bisexual participants. Whereas participants who identified as heterosexual or who were perceived to be heterosexual were either teased for not dating or categorized as promiscuous for dating too much, the participants who were openly in same-sex relationships dealt with derogatory comments about the girls they were dating. For example a neutral gendered bisexual participant stated,

> Well, in secondary school . . . I had this experience of bullying because I had a girlfriend... and it was weird the way it happened because people would make fun of me. They would be like, "you like girls, that's so disgusting." But also they would very much make fun of [my girlfriend]... And come tell me really bad things about her. They made up this story for example, that she would wear thongs to school upside down so that she could masturbate in class. Which was obviously not true... But this was one of the stories that went around school. And so people would come up to me... and [say], "how can you go out with someone like that." Or, "she's so fat."…"she's so disgusting. How can you kiss something like that, that's so gross."

As shown in this quote, the participant dealt with demeaning comments about her girlfriend. Furthermore, the notion of the participant being intimate with her girlfriend was portrayed by the participant's peers as disgusting.

Lesbian and bisexual participants also reported other experiences of bullying that included classmates talking negatively and spreading rumors about their dating and sexual behavior in which the classmates assumed participants were engaging. For example, a masculine gendered lesbian participant who attended a public secondary school stated,

> In the beginning of grade 12 there started to be rumors going around about me that I… had sex with a girl over the summer, which had happened, and I was totally freaked out about that. I was like, I don't want people here to know about that. And so I think I heard it from my friend who'd heard it from a guy who'd heard it from a guy—So there was those three people, but it hadn't gone beyond that as far as I knew. So I was able to trace it back and I went to the guy and I was like "You need to stop this." And as far as I know he did, cause I never heard about it again.

For this participant, having rumors spread about her sex life was highly anxiety provoking since it was so very personal and something which she wanted to remain private, and moreover, because she had not yet come out as lesbian to her peers at school.

Evidently, for the participants who were openly dating girls or who were perceived by their peers to be doing so, the sexual aspect of their relationships was highlighted and magnified by their fellow students through comments, insults, rumors, and depictions of their same-sex sexual relationships as disgusting.

Response to Bullying

Participants described that their immediate response to bullying took on four main forms, (a) ignoring/not responding, (b) arguing/talking back, (c) shifting between responses over time, and (d) avoiding the bullies. These various forms of responses will be discussed below.

Ignoring. A number of participants reported that one of their immediate responses to the bullying targeted at them was to ignore or not respond. This response was employed by heterosexual, as well as lesbian and bisexual participants. For example, a masculine gendered lesbian participant who was verbally bullied about her sexual orientation in middle and high

school by male and female classmates explained that her primary response was to ignore the bullying immediately after it occurred as a way of staying safe. As she stated,

> I mostly just ignored [the bullying] or laughed it off…it made me very uncomfortable and it made me feel unsafe… I didn't like that it was happening but I wasn't like I wish I wasn't gay. I was just like well this sucks. A lot. But… I guess I'll just live with it… until I'm out of this school…

Similarly, a couple of heterosexual participants who were bullied for wearing masculine or untrendy clothing, for not being interested in dating, or for having interests that were not stereotypically feminine recalled that they also did not respond to the bullying in order to emotionally shield themselves from hurtful comments. For example, a masculine gendered heterosexual participant reported,

> If people made fun of me, a lot of the time I just wouldn't respond because my response when something bothers me is that I just emotionally shut off. I don't retaliate... And people [who bullied me] would be like '[participant's name] won't care [if we make fun of her]. She's a man anyway' and stuff like that.

When bullied, this participant disengaged emotionally to buffer the distressing effects of the victimization, so she did not to respond to the bullies' taunts. However, her silence when faced with bullying led the bullies to conclude that she was unaffected by it. Moreover, her silence was perceived by the bullies as a characteristically stoic, masculine response, which further strengthened their perception of her as too masculine in general. Additionally, a neutral gendered heterosexual participant bullied for the same aforementioned reasons stated, "I don't think I would say anything [in response to the bullying] because it was just an awkward thing to deal with, and so for me it was just like, what can I do?"

Other participants indicated that they did not respond when they had feelings of powerlessness or shock while they were being bullied, which made it difficult to react quickly to

the situation. For example, a masculine gendered heterosexual participant who was verbally and physically bullied by an older male student for his perception that she was lesbian explained,

> I think I was just shocked and scared and disgusted and I guess appalled at my friend too, who didn't say anything [to defend me]… I wish that I would have either left sooner or, you know, stuck up for myself even. I wish that I would have been less naïve and less trusting and not stayed around for another 20 minutes to have it happen.

Feeling shocked and scared, this participant did not verbally respond to the bullying until several minutes had passed, at which point she walked away from the situation.

Certain participants reported that their motivation for not responding to the bullying was to avoid appearing bothered which they feared would result in getting more attention from the bullies. For example, a feminine gendered heterosexual participant described how she responded to verbal bullying from boys in her class who had insinuated a romantic relationship between her and her stepbrother, and made sexually objectifying comments toward her:

> I was usually pretty passive about it… Sometimes I would try to shoot comments back, but they were usually shut down because it would be me against four guys. So, I kind of learned to take it and walk away… one time they came up to me and they were like, 'How was your night last night' and I was like, 'it was fine. I didn't do anything.' And they were like 'So was [name of step brother] watching you sleep?' And I would just be like 'You guys are really funny' and walk away. I guess it took away some of their pride in what they said. Because I knew that fighting back was just going to let them know that they won.

As evident in this quote, the participant's goal of reducing the amount of attention from the bullies was achieved by walking away from them or minimally responding.

Arguing and talking back. Another response reported by participants was arguing and talking back to the bullies. Some participants hoped that such responses would reduce the threat of bullying, while others felt they had no other alternative. For example, some participants felt that a provocative, confrontational response to bullying would make them appear tough, which they saw as better than appearing sad or hurt. For example, a neutral gendered bisexual

participant, who was bullied due to how her peers perceived her sexual orientation and level of attractiveness stated,

> I guess [my response] alternated between pretending to ignore things or getting extremely reactive… and generally trying to talk back. I don't think I would ever react with crying in front of anyone… it was really important to me not to, so I would be really combative. It didn't help or get me anywhere… I'd try to insult them or do anything that I thought might have shock value in terms of my reaction. Just try to get loud and angry.

Along the same lines, a masculine gendered heterosexual participant who was bullied by boys about her weight and their perception of her as lesbian explained,

> Honestly, I'd just say something really mean back or shut off socially kind of and I'd just try and not engage with people. . . I just remember [bully's name], he'd say "Oh, well you're gay" and I'd be like "Well you're fat." You know . . . I'd kind of retort back with something nasty, which just made things worse for me. And I kind of knew it was making me more alienated but at the time I [felt] it's better than getting abused. I just really tried to put up a defense system of being super tough and scary . . .

Though participants hoped that by arguing and talking back they would be viewed as tough and unintimidated by others and thus reduce the threat of bullying, for the most part, participants did not find their responses effective.

Whereas some participants hoped that arguing and talking back would reduce the threat of bullying, other participants used this approach because a better one was not evident to them. For example, a neutral gendered, bisexual participant who was dating a girl reported,

> I would just tend to snap something back, or just keep my mouth shut and not say anything… But it's hard you know, because there were times when people would tell me things and I wanted to answer [with] something but what are you supposed to answer to like, "oh you're gay," like, "oh you're straight?" There's not exactly anything you can [say]... and so often I would be like, 'it's none of your business what's your problem with that'… But I don't know, it all seemed a bit futile really...

Shift in response. Next, participants discussed how their response to bullying shifted over time from ignoring it, to talking back to the bullies, and becoming increasingly angry. For

example, a masculine gendered bisexual participant who was bullied by female peers about their perception that she was lesbian said this about her response to the bullying,

> Initially . . . I would just be quiet… I wouldn't say that I didn't want to lie to [the bullies], I didn't really care what they thought, but I didn't want to lie to myself more than anything. And if they'd be like "Stupid dyke" then I wasn't going to be like, "I'm not" cause part of me was... So most of the time I would just let it slide and not say anything… As I got older… I would certainly say things back… just along the lines of like, "Really? You're going to waste your time saying these things to me and, and doing these things to me? You don't have anything better to do with your time and what have I ever done to you?" and "How is who I am and my choices offensive to you in any way?" And, "How does that affect how you're going to live your life? I'm not preaching and I'm not imposing it on you." The times I had a girlfriend I never brought her to school. That's for sure. Nobody ever saw anything like that so I would just kind of try and question them. And just kind of in failed attempts to make them be introspective…

By responding in this way, the participant sometimes managed to stop the bullying for the remainder of a school day, but it resumed soon thereafter. As another example, a masculine gendered lesbian participant who was teased by her female friends about her overall unfeminine gender presentation and who had rumours about her sex life spread in high school stated,

> One of the things that my mom had gotten me to [try was], you know just like "Don't react and then they'll stop" but I think because I didn't react they didn't realize maybe that what they were doing was hurting. And then eventually as I got closer and closer to just cutting things off with [the friends that bullied me], I'd start getting angrier and angrier as they were doing it, and then they didn't understand why I was responding like that and they started saying like, "You're overreacting. You're being a bitch."

As the participant explained, she initially took her mother's advice of ignoring the bullying, but over time she became increasingly angry with the friends who were taunting her, until she ultimately ended the friendships altogether.

Avoid bullies. As participants dealt with bullying on an ongoing basis and tried to find the most effective response strategies, avoiding the bullies as much as possible during school hours was viewed as a clear-cut response that would reduce the amount of bullying experienced at school. For example, a masculine gendered heterosexual participant reported, "I mean I just

avoided [the bullies], obviously." Other participants discussed how they tried to remain inconspicuous to avoid the bullies. For example, a masculine gendered bisexual participant reported, "If [the bullying] was in the hallway I was like, just put your head down and keep walking." Another neutral gendered bisexual participant reported,

> I don't think there was any specific place [in school where I was bullied]. It was just like… within eyesight of certain people was where it would tend to happen. You know what I mean?... As in I would avoid people. I didn't avoid areas.

Thus, participants tried to move from one location in school to another without being noticed in order to remain out of certain people's line of vision in an attempt to avoid further bullying.

Ultimately, regardless of strategy be it, ignoring, arguing, avoiding or using a combination of these responses, participants hoped to create some semblance of security for themselves at school. Unfortunately, participants found their responses to be largely ineffective, which led them to give up hope that they could ameliorate the harassment with their responses and as such, became resigned to the circumstances not changing until secondary school ended.

Influence of Bullying on School Experiences

As a result of the bullying, participants described feeling uneasy in their relationships and interactions with their peers at school. As well, the bullying influenced their academic performance.

Sense of self in relation to peers at school. Participants felt particularly uneasy in their relationships with their fellow students at school. Specifically, they described feeling alienated, at risk for their safety, and unable to act authentically at school.

Alienation. Certain participants reported feeling alienated from the other students in their secondary schools, which resulted in them feeling awkward, weird, and unwanted. For instance, a masculine gendered lesbian participant discussed being insulted, ostracized, and

disrespected when other students made nasty comments about her having a girlfriend and when they asked her personal questions about her sexual orientation. In the context of having experienced these forms of bullying in junior high, she made this statement about how she felt among her peers, "I think [my being lesbian] was the big news [at school]. That was the thing for people to focus on. I very much felt like… a freak show for a long time because of that…"

In addition to feeling weird among peers at school, some participants felt unwelcome and unwanted by them. Feeling unwelcome was described, by a masculine gendered bisexual participant, as she had been called homophobic names, had insulting notes about her sexual orientation stuck to her backpack, and had been ostracized by her fellow female students. In terms of feeling unwanted by her peers she stated,

> The 'you don't belong stuff' I found [difficult to hear] more than 'stupid dyke' like, I don't care. That doesn't really bother me. But the 'we don't want you here'… that I found was the worst. Okay, you don't have to like me and you don't have to like my sexual orientation and you don't have to be friends with me and that's fine but telling me to get out of your space was the worst.

Safety. Participants also reported that the bullying they experienced resulted in them feeling fearful and unsafe at school. For instance, a neutral gendered bisexual participant reported that she developed a sense of fear among her fellow students as a result of being (a) insulted by them because they thought she was lesbian, (b) mocked by them because they considered her unattractive, and (c) gossiped about due to their presumptions of her sex life. Regarding how she felt in her relationships with peers at school she reported, "Well initially in the lower years when I was bullied a lot I felt very insecure, very unsafe like I would constantly be dripping sweat… because I was afraid of people." A neutral gendered bisexual participant also used the term "unsafe" to describe her relationships with her peers at school. The participant's feeling of vulnerability developed as a result of being (a) sexually groped by male

peers in junior high, (b) gossiped about by her friends for her dating what they thought were many boys, and (c) tormented by peers for being achievement oriented in school. Regarding feeling unsafe, she reported,

> I would describe secondary school as just not feeling in a very safe place with friends to be honest or to explore alternative issues or lifestyles… So it wouldn't be outright but it would be a comment like "lesbians are so gross" or something, and it creates an environment where you're like well, I'm not going to tell you that I could be bi…

Authenticity. Due to the bullying, participants also described feeling unable to show their authentic self at school. For example, a masculine gendered heterosexual participant described how ever since boys in middle school bullied her because they thought she was lesbian, she became more reserved with her fellow students, maintained some distance from them, and did not allow them to fully get to know her. Although the bullying subsided in secondary school, it continued to impact how she felt in her relationships with her fellow students. As she explained,

> I've always had this idea that there's the real me and then there's the public me... school is public... and then I have my friends who really care about me outside of [school]... [the public me] changed [over time]. In middle school I was super angry and the public me was scary whereas in high school people didn't dislike me and I went to parties and stuff but like... I was really reserved from fully engaging in the school community at all... [The private me] was like, I loved my friends, I went out all the time.

This participant did not feel safe to be fully genuine in school, as she had previously been bullied for not being thin enough, for being academically focused, and for dressing in a masculine way. Consequently, she only revealed certain aspects of herself in school. Namely, in middle school she tended to act angry at school to deal with the bullying, and in later years, she was reserved and unengaged with her fellow students as a result of losing trust in them following the bullying.

Another masculine gendered heterosexual participant similarly felt that she could not be her authentic self at school if she was to be accepted by her fellow students. That is, since she

was previously bullied by her peers because they viewed her appearance, style of dress, and interests as masculine, she did not feel that she could show her personality and identities without facing negative social consequences. Consequently, she went through phases of being more genuine, such as pursuing her interest in music and video games, and socializing with people who also enjoyed them. However, she also went through periods dressing and acting in a way that she felt was most socially acceptable. As she explained,

> [Me and this girl who transferred to my high school], we went through a lot of the same body-type butch bullying. And her way around it was to be really ditzy and bleach her hair and wear pink all the time and try to make up for how she was built by being the stereotype of a Barbie. And it worked... she was socially accepted and boys really liked her. So I decided that was a good thing to do because I had very little in the way of confidence in my interests and hobbies, and I was still in this state of flux of like I don't really know where I fit in, and since it was in a new school and I didn't really have any strong relationships with anyone it just made it way too easy to latch on to someone that was willing to socialize me... And the other side of me was a shy nerd. I was in all the bands and musicals. I really like Lord of the Rings and video games, and there was a really wonderful group of people at the school that I was friends with because of common interests and we got along well and they were really nice. But for some reason I also needed to feel socially accepted...

As demonstrated by the above quotes, being bullied in secondary school resulted in participants feeling awkward, that they stood out in a negative way, and that they were unwelcome and unwanted among their peers. Furthermore, the bullying prevented participants from feeling secure, contented, and genuine in their relationships with their peers.

Social interactions with peers. Regardless of their actual sexual orientation, how it was perceived by others, and how they expressed their gender, participants reported that the bullying they experienced led them to become more inhibited and withdrawn at school. In terms of withdrawing from peers, a participant reported,

> I was really outgoing up until my freshman year of high school. And… I'm really introverted now. I'm really a lot shyer, a lot more guarded about who I spend my time with, what I tell them, things like that. So I don't know if I want to chalk it all up to that [bullying] experience but I mean I'm definitely a lot more introverted now.

As shown in this quote, the participant became more reserved and less socially confident after being bullied in the ninth grade, and her social guardedness continued into her adulthood. Further, a participant made these comments about how the bullying affected the way in which she interacted with others in secondary school,

> I really did withdraw from a lot of social things... I never went out of my way to join anything extracurricular even when I did have the opportunity. And I just was really withdrawn. And... who knows, I might have had the opportunity to make friends if I tried but I felt like it wasn't worth trying so I just stuck with the friends I had... And, like I said, even into high school, I went and found my friends elsewhere and not in school.

As demonstrated in this quote, the participant became more withdrawn in high school, a tendency that she felt she needed to overcome in university. As she explained,

> Since I got to college I've been so hell-bent on being the most involved and the most socially active and just like I was going to change myself and last year I was president of my dorm and I was going to every party and I know everybody. And I was convinced that I had been wronged and that's the only reason I suffered socially [in secondary school] and I thought, I'm going to take control of my own destiny, but it got really exhausting really fast and now... I've come to terms with the fact that I'm just not that much of a social person and so I've kind of mellowed out.

Moreover, for this participant, it took several years after the bullying subsided in secondary school for her to figure out her preferred way of interacting with others. That is, since she had been reserved with high school peers in reaction to having been bullied by them in the past, and then starting college was focused on being highly out going with the hope of gaining social acceptance, she had not identified the relational style that was most congruent for her. Additionally, a different participant discussed becoming more socially withdrawn as a result of bullying in secondary school. She reported, "Especially in high school if I wasn't with friends I was, you know, like headphones in, hood up, just walking around. I would cut myself off from other people." The same participant further stated,

> Even now I'm more hesitant to form closer friendships and especially now that I'm in [name of city] I find I don't have any really close friends here. You know, I have people who I'll talk to in my classes or, you know, we'll go out like a couple of times a month or something. But I don't have a best friend up here or anything. And I think some of that is just I don't want to put myself in that situation [where bullying could happen] again…

As demonstrated in this quote, the participant started withdrawing from her peers in secondary school, and she continued to feel hesitant to develop close relationships into her university years. Likewise, a masculine gendered lesbian participant reported,

> In seventh grade I had much better relationships with everyone… and then it slowed down and I just focused on the few friends that I did have and we excluded ourselves from others. Not necessarily intentionally, but… in the way we acted or the way we dressed or whatever…you know we weren't exactly approachable all the time.

As the participants explained, being bullied led them to become more inhibited among their peers in school. Although some participants recognized that being withdrawn may have inadvertently blocked them from connecting with other students who perhaps were not bullies, their expectation of hostility from their peers was so high that they believed trying to socialize with any fellow student seemed unwise. Further, some participants reported a long term effect of the bullying on how they interacted with peers such that it influenced their relationships beyond secondary school oftentimes into university and adulthood.

Apart from withdrawing from peers, a couple of participants reported that they developed greater competitiveness, which led them to be perceived by their peers as having an air of superiority. In other words, being competitive with peers at school and finding ways to surpass them provided the participants with a source of confidence that they could keep in mind and utilize to counteract the denigration they faced from peers. For example, a masculine gendered heterosexual participant reported, "I do remember taking a lot of pride in [doing well in school]... but it kind of translated into me thinking I'm better than everybody. I distinctly remember somebody saying, 'You just think your better than everyone.'" Further, a neutral gendered

bisexual participant described how she developed a competitive interpersonal style in secondary school. For example, she stated,

> I had a real competitive edge which I think is something that I used to deal with, like if people were bullying me about being a slut or something I could say to myself "well, you know I've got better grades, what's it matter?" so, I mean as an adult maybe it gave me a sort of snobbishness that I've been really trying to work…

She further described how her competitive mindset continued into her university years and how she came to view it as interpersonally problematic because it was contributing to relational problems with friends. For instance,

> You know I see traces of it in some of my friendships now, and part of me takes culpability for it because I think the person that I was maybe even just a year or 6 months ago was a competitive person and probably a person who could alienate people who were quite insecure or other competitive people… [I've been reflecting on how] that can negatively affect people when you have a competitive mindset… people start to feel like they're inadequate, and that's not a good way to carry on friendships or relationships…

As illustrated in this section, experiencing bullying led participants to become increasingly withdrawn and inhibited in their relationships with their secondary school peers. Furthermore, certain participants believed that the way they related to others continued to be affected well after high school. Specifically, as university students, some participants continued to be hesitant to establish close friendships, while others became highly outgoing and social in an attempt to make up for the social life they felt they did not achieve in secondary school. Beyond becoming socially withdrawn, some participants became increasingly competitive with their fellow students in order to boost their own confidence and have a source of pride that they could turn to when being torn down by bullying. However, these participants believed that their competitiveness was poorly received by their secondary school peers, and for one participant her competitive attitude created relational challenges in university. Specifically, she realized that

people she considered friends felt driven to match her achievements, which was a dynamic she had been reflecting upon and trying to rectify.

Engagement in school. Participants discussed that as a result of the bullying they were less engaged at school. That is, participants reported avoiding school, considering transferring to another school, decreasing focus on academic achievement, or conversely, putting greater focus on academics.

A number of participants reported that due to the bullying they experienced, they hated going to school and often tried to not to attend. For example, in describing how she felt after she began to be the target of bullying in secondary school, a neutral gendered heterosexual participant stated, "I started distancing myself from school and all those people… it was kind of like university, I'd go [to classes] and then do my own thing afterwards…" Another neutral gendered bisexual participant reported, "I must have dreaded going, I took a lot of days off. I went to classes but I think I spent a lot of time just being late or lingering in the hallway." As shown in these quotes, experiencing bullying made being in school feel unbearable to the participants, and led them to avoid it by taking days off and skipping classes.

In addition to avoiding school, some participants transferred or considered transferring to other schools. A masculine gendered heterosexual participant was the only participant who actually transferred out of her secondary school. Her decision to transfer to another school was solidified in 9th grade after being bullied by male students because they thought she was lesbian. She stated, "My first high school I just went for ninth grade and then I transferred to a public boarding school… it was my ninth grade year that was the worst at the public school." Ultimately, she was happy with her decision to transfer schools, as she did not experience bullying there.

Further, all the participants who considered transferring schools but ultimately decided to remain in their original schools, identified as bisexual. Regarding the idea of transferring schools, one of these participants stated,

> Initially I was like "Maybe I'll ask my parents to go to a different school" but I thought "I'll ride it out and see" and the more I spoke to my friends who went to different private all-girls schools, public schools, co-ed schools, it kind of seemed like [bullying] is everywhere so there was nothing to be gained… And by that time I started grade eight I learned to deal with it and [grew] a thick skin… and it didn't really get worse until grade ten… [but] I was like I just have one more year left, I'm not going to switch now… I knew the way things worked, so I thought, if I go somewhere else I'll need to start at the bottom and I'm going to be this new target for all these people so… I'll just stick it out.

Another reported,

> I tried to switch schools…Pretty desperately… I begged for it every day in grade 7… during the summer my mother took me auditioning for other schools, but she would only look at private schools… So I was just having total panic attacks at the costs of other schools cause they're way more expensive…

Overall, transferring schools due to bullying was not a common experience among participants, but it was an option that some, particularly bisexual participants, considered. However, differences in opinion between the participants and their parents on the type of school they should attend, the cost of certain schools, knowing that they would be graduating in the near future, as well as the uncertainty of whether the situation would be better, worse, or the status quo with a new group of students led participants to stay in their original schools. Differences in opinion between the participants and their parents on the type of school they should attend and the cost of certain schools were also indicated as reasons for not transferring schools.

Academic performance. A number of participants reported that the bullying they experienced influenced their academic performance either positively or negatively. The participants who reported that their performance in school improved as a result of the bullying

were predominantly heterosexual, though some bisexual participants also described a similar influence on their studies. For example, a feminine gendered heterosexual participant stated,

> I think it almost improved my academics because I did have such a minute social life. I focused a lot more on schooling than a lot of kids in my grade… I didn't have anything else to turn to, so I just turned to my schoolwork.

Another participant stated, "[The bullying] pushed me more towards academics... and I think that's just because it was kind of my solace in that period." As these quotes reveal, academics was an outlet that some participants used to take their mind off bullying. A couple of bisexual participants also described an increase in focus on school work. For example, "I always did well academically…That was almost like a retreat for me. I'd be like 'Well I don't want to hang out with you. I'll go to the library and study.'" Furthermore, as stated by a neutral gendered bisexual participant, "I could see myself getting out [of my hometown], and that's why… I threw myself into the Advanced Placement classes… I knew that if I could do well enough in these things that this wouldn't be my reality forever." This participant also discussed how her drive to achieve academically continued after secondary school. For example,

> [The bullying] did put me in this mind set of I just had to keep on achieving to keep on getting out, and I tied a lot of my self-worth to my academics and… especially in my early adult years and my first few years at [name of participant's university] I was very much living the president of the clubs, working at [student organization at participant's university] kind of thing and looking for those self-aggrandizing titles. And… this year I really realized that that's not fulfilling and that's an adult trajectory that was established for me by a really damaging childhood and secondary experience and so, I guess looking back and looking at those experiences as bullying, as abuse, has put it into perspective that maybe I need to work on my own happiness in a more productive way.

As demonstrated above, experiencing bullying in school led a number of participants to become more academically focused. However, the greater focus placed on academics did not change their overall bullying experience or buffer its negative effects. That is, although the participants obtained better grades from placing greater attention on their studies, this arose as

product of having to deal with unbearable social circumstances at school, namely isolation and rejection from peers.

Regardless of sexual orientation, certain participants reported that their academic performance was negatively affected by the bullying. For example, one participant reported, "I pretty much totally stopped working…" Additionally, when asked about how the bullying affected her, another participant stated,

> I stopped trying as hard in school probably starting around grade ten. I'd start procrastinating more and I could float by on the bare minimum… But in grade nine I remember I was doing a lot of work and putting effort into things and then as time went on it was just less and less important to me...

In sum, several participants described that their academic performance improved as a result of utilizing studying as a coping mechanism. In other words, immersing themselves in school work was a distraction that helped them cope with the bullying. Further, focusing on academics was used by some participants as a vehicle to gain admission to university in places far away from their hometown and secondary school peers. One participant in particular discussed how even after escaping her hometown by attending university in another province, she continued to be highly achievement driven. Still other participants reported a reduction in the effort they put into school, difficulty performing up to their full academic potential, and a downward shift in the grades due to the bullying experienced.

Psychosocial Effects of Bullying

Participants reported that the bullying affected their overall sense of wellbeing, as well as how they related to others. Ways in which participants' wellbeing was negatively affected by the bullying included an increase in their experience of negative emotions, lowered self-esteem and the development of poor body image. At the interpersonal level, they reported that it increased

their mistrust of people, led them to avoid confrontation, and influenced how they behaved in their intimate relationships and friendships.

Negative emotions. Regardless of their gender expression or sexual orientation, participants reported that they experienced a variety of negative emotions resulting from being bullied. Specifically, participants discussed experiencing feelings of sadness, anxiety, anger, and isolation.

Profound sadness was an emotion that several participants felt as a result of bullying. For example, a neutral gendered bisexual participant described feeling sad and going through a period of depression after breaking up with her girlfriend in high school; a break-up she initiated in order put to an end to the relentless insults she received from her peers about her sexual orientation and her girlfriend's perceived unattractiveness. As she reported, "After I broke up with her I did go through quite a severe… depressive phase… I would cry every night. I just always needed to be alone…" Also discussing feelings of sadness, a neutral gendered heterosexual participant reported "I think [dealing with the bullying]... made me sad a lot of the time. It just felt like I'm not accepted. I'm different. I'm weird." Furthermore, a masculine gendered lesbian participant described feeling upset about the bullying, though her feelings were not always apparent to others. As she stated, "I was upset internally but I wasn't crying in school…"

Additionally, some participants discussed experiencing anxiety as a result of the bullying. For example, the participant just mentioned also reported, "I was just very unsettled and kind of like on-edge a lot of the time." In addition, a neutral gendered bisexual participant reported, "I was really tense constantly… Like I would be in a classroom and I would be so self-conscious about my own posture and body language because everyone would always be making fun of that

stuff." This participant further described how she continued to struggle with feelings of anxiety into adulthood,

> It really frustrates me that I have and have always had a lot of emotional problems and that takes strength to deal with. And that I'm going to spend my entire life struggling with things that hold me back you know. I can't get through job interviews because I'm too anxious. You know I have trouble in school because I'm too anxious. And a lot of that is still social anxiety and it just sucks that things will be so easy for specific people [who bullied me]… And I mean maybe I would [still] have as many problems because I was an anxious baby you know I was terrified of people and cameras and vacuum cleaners and loud noises and everything you know? But obviously I can't write off the possibility that all [the bullying], it obviously contributed so that sucks…

Anxiety was also a feeling reported by heterosexual participants. For example, a neutral gendered heterosexual participant stated, "I had terrible anxiety cause everyday I'd go in like, 'What fresh hell is today going to bring me' It was a big rollercoaster emotionally."

Anger was another emotion reported by participants. For example, a masculine gendered heterosexual participant stated,

> I was mostly just really angry at everyone and everything. I became really… cynical, which I guess didn't help on the making friends front because then when people were nice to me I would just assume that they were mean anyway and kind of shrug them off and ignore them. So, yah, mostly just really angry.

Another masculine gendered heterosexual participant discussed how she experienced a great deal of anger resulting from a combination of being bullied and other serious personal challenges. Apart from bullying, the personal challenges that this participant experienced included body image concerns, the loss of her aunt, being sexually abused by her father when she was a toddler, and her parents' custody battle. As she explained,

> [The bullying] just fuelled into this whole anger thing and it was how I reacted to all the other things going on and this just kind of cemented how I portrayed myself to the world for like a good hunk of the years... And, yah, at the time I really just felt the anger thing...

Next, participants reported that the bullying resulted in them feeling isolated and alone. For example, a neutral gendered heterosexual participant discussed how alone she felt after her

friends excluded her from activities. This loneliness was exacerbated when her friends posted both hurtful comments about her on social networking sites and photos of themselves having fun without her,

> That was probably the hardest part of [the bullying] was seeing things like that. You know if you make a comment to me whatever, I can blow it off, you can see that I don't care that much. But if you're going to do something outside of school that makes me feel hurt and lonely, then that's sucky.

Additionally, a neutral gendered bisexual participant who went through a period of depression described feeling alone, "Yah in those moments there is no one you can talk to… not because no one would listen, but because you feel like no one would listen…"

As the participants described, they experienced a range of difficult emotional reactions as a result of the bullying at school. Furthermore, for some participants the struggle with these negative emotions, such as profound sadness and anxiety, continued into adulthood.

Influence on self-image. Many participants reported that the way they felt about themselves was negatively affected by the bullying. Specifically, participants reported that bullying lowered their self-esteem, made them feel insecure about their sexual identity, and was detrimental to their overall body image.

Several participants reported that bullying negatively affected their self-esteem. For example, a neutral gendered bisexual participant reported, "Well [being bullied] affected me very negatively because I felt there was something inherently wrong with me that I couldn't even pretend to act acceptable by whatever standards… it just made me feel really bad about myself and… worthless." Additionally, a masculine gendered lesbian participant reported,

> I knew [the bullying] was affecting me… I didn't like it and I tried not to let it get to me but… I couldn't push it away. And I kept trying to tell myself, they don't know what they're talking about or whatever but it just didn't really work. It was something gradual but I definitely think looking back on it that I became less and less comfortable with myself as it was going on.

Similarly, a feminine gendered heterosexual participant recalled, "My self-esteem plummeted after [the bullying started]."

Some bisexual and lesbian participants mentioned above reported that the negative effects on their self-image persisted into their adulthood. For example, a neutral gendered bisexual participant reported,

> I find it hard to talk about these things, just because people say, look at you, you are so confident! How do you have any problems? And I'm thinking, yah, you wait until you see me at 2 A.M. in my bed. Cause as I said, when I was younger I was bullied for being fat. And so it always haunts me that I'm ugly, and I'm fat, no one likes me, because I'm so boring, and I have such a horrible personality, and I'm not interesting at all…

The same participant also stated, "There are times that I have incredibly low self-esteem, that I'm not happy with who I am at all. I'm sure that in part that must have been affected by [the bullying]." Similarly, a neutral gendered bisexual stated "Probably just a lot of where my self-doubt comes from…" As well, a masculine gendered lesbian participant stated, "Going through high school, and even now, I had very low self-esteem, I just couldn't see myself as something valuable after that cause every day [in secondary school] someone would make some kind of negative comment about me."

Additionally, couple of participants discussed how being bullied negatively affected their view of their lesbian or bisexual sexual identity. For example, a masculine gendered bisexual participant reported that although the bullying did not negatively affect her self-esteem per se, it influenced the extent to which she felt secure about her own sexual identity in secondary school. For example,

> I think [the bullying] initially made me really insecure… I think it just made me question like, "Oh, maybe there's just, there's something wrong with me and I'm not supposed to be this way. And well why I don't fit in and why am I not like them?" were kind of my insecurities… So in that sense it made me feel… like an outcast and like an outsider…

Another participant reported that as a result of bullying, she had difficulty accepting her own sexual identity during secondary school and for some time thereafter. As she stated,

> Throughout high school I identified as bisexual, and it wasn't until I came to university that I realized I was a lesbian. And I think I had a lot of issues with that just in terms of, I always felt like I couldn't deny that I like girls but I always thought, you know, I can still wind up with a man. No one has to know and I'll be comfortable… and I think some of it did stem from the fact that… lesbian to me had all these stereotypes attached to it and I was like, I can't be that because I felt that something about me would fundamentally be changed if I was a lesbian. And when I realized it I was kind of freaked out and [I thought], then I'll be proving them all right throughout school… So that was kind of scary for me. And I think some of it definitely could be traced back to [the bullying].

Although certain participants continued to experience long-term negative effects on their self-image, some reported that their views of themselves improved as time passed. For example, a masculine gendered bisexual participant recalled how her comfort level with her sexual orientation increased over time,

> As I got older and the years went by, it wasn't that I necessarily became more sure… I became more comfortable with being unsure… in saying "I don't know who I am and I don't know what I want and I'm going to experiment and see and I don't know how certain things are going to make me feel and that's why I'm going to do them"… And as it went on and as I got older I was more secure in… who I was- Like I never really labeled myself as bisexual or as this or as that. And I just, I didn't really care anymore.

As shown in the above quote, the participant, who was initially insecure about her sexual orientation, eventually became more accepting of it and came to view it as an important part of her identity. For this participant, having friends outside school that identified as sexual minorities represented an important source of support that helped her become more comfortable with her own sexuality, which will be discussed in a later section. Additionally, a feminine gendered heterosexual participant reported,

> I think [the bullying] definitely made me stronger. Growing up I was always very submissive… very quiet. And then after that I became a lot more outgoing… now I'm pretty confident with myself. So, I think [the bullying] changed me for the better… I think just dealing with people talking about me for so long, I got to a point where I kind of cracked and decided that I wasn't going to care what people thought of me anymore…

> and my attitude now is if people want to be friends with me, they can be friends with me; if they don't want to be friends with me, they don't have to be friends with me.

Consistent with the participants who felt that their self-image improved over time, participants discussed ways in which they grew stronger from dealing with the bullying, and these participants were predominantly lesbian or bisexual. For example, a masculine gendered lesbian participant stated,

> [The bullying] probably made me…tougher…yeah it made me more confident in the long run I guess because I knew they were wrong for doing that. So I'd say that although the bullying is not good I don't have purely negative feelings about it right now.

As well, a neutral gendered bisexual participant reported, "I don't know, it has two sides, cause I do still get like very, very low points regularly, but at the same time I do feel like it has made me a stronger person." Although another neutral gendered participant identified many ways in which bullying negatively affected her self-image, she also reported, "it definitely eventually caused me to build a different type of self-confidence out of knowing myself." Similarly, a feminine gendered heterosexual participant stated,

> I realize now what [the bullying experiences have] done for me and like I don't want to say I wouldn't have changed it, but I wouldn't be the same person if that hadn't happened to me, so I'm kind of grateful almost that it happened, just because I've become stronger.

Clearly, several participants could see ways in which they grew resilient from dealing with the bullying. However, all of them recognized any strength gained from coping with the bullying were accompanied by harmful, effects, some of which were long lasting.

Influence on body image. Bisexual and heterosexual participants also reported that the bullying and social rejection that they experienced negatively affected their body image and sense of physical attractiveness resulting in difficulties with eating. For example, a neutral gendered bisexual participant who was bullied for being overweight in primary school explained that the bullying in secondary school influenced her perception of her appearance. As she stated,

"I felt really fat and ugly and stupid." She also reported that she engaged in unhealthy eating-related behaviors in secondary school. For instance, "I started throwing up my meals, things like that…" When the same participant was asked about how the bullying currently affects her, she did not mention concerns about eating, but explained that she continues to struggle with negative feelings about her appearance. "I'm very good at being like no everything's fine [around other people]…But like then when I'm by myself that's when it comes to haunt me… these feelings of I'm ugly and fat and not interesting." In addition, another neutral gendered bisexual participant who was bullied about her weight in primary school and into junior high school reported,

> I kind of ignored [the bullying] and then I lost 20 pounds and it went away… My dad was working in cancer research and he was kind of an asshole too and he would be like, "No, you can't eat that…You'll get fatter." And then he does most of the cooking so he would only cook like vegetables and stuff and I only really had dinner at home. I only really ate dinner…so I lost weight cause I ended up eating less.

Thus, being pressured to be thin, not only through bullying by peers at school, but from her family, ultimately led her to develop a form of disordered eating wherein she restricted her food intake in order to lose weight. She further reported,

> **Interviewer:** How has the bullying that you experienced influenced who you are today as an adult?
>
> **Participant:** I have a boyfriend now and I'm trying to figure out if he's actually my boyfriend or if he's just with me cause he likes sleeping with girls.
>
> **Interviewer:** And so how do you see that as being related to the bullying?
>
> **Participant:** Cause I don't see myself as particularly attractive. I don't think I look very good.

A masculine gendered heterosexual participant also discussed how she struggled with negative perceptions of her size at the end of primary through 7th grade. For example,

> I don't think anybody [in school] ever said anything about me being heavy but I remember when I lost the weight people were openly like "Holy shit! She must have an eating disorder" or, "Whoa". And some people were like "Oh my God! You look so

> much better!" And it just drove it in how much worse I looked [before]. And honestly at that age I really wasn't too aware. It wasn't until I was to the point where I was like really, really overweight—it snuck up on me and I felt very out-of-control of it. And eventually at the end of 7th grade I just thought, I'm doing this now before it gets out of hand because I don't want to be fat in high school. But I just remember after the fact some of the attention from the guys was like "Oh, you got hot now" kind of thing... Like, "Maybe she has low self-esteem too cause she was fat". But then like I said, I started to be more socially accepted, which I feel is almost just as negative as the bullying when, you know, the only time you can be accepted is when… you're not huge anymore...

The bullying that this participant endured in secondary school was not specifically focused on her weight, however, the improvement in her social life that occurred after the weight loss reinforced the belief that she needed to be thin in order to be accepted by others.

Another masculine gendered heterosexual participant discussed how dealing with bullying led her to try to lose weight. This participant had been bullied by her peers because they perceived her body type and features to be masculine. She stated,

> So, towards the end of grade 8 I guess... I'd had enough of it, I was starting a new school. I just couldn't deal with starting a new school without having any friends. So, first of all there was a couple of months of, "[participant's name] doesn't want to eat and throws up the things she does," cause I wanted to lose weight.

Thus, being bullied about her masculine bodily appearance and being socially ostracized at school by her fellow students led the participant to lose weight in an attempt to gain greater social acceptance. This participant continued to be dissatisfied with her body and engaged in unhealthy behaviors to regulate her weight for some time after secondary school, and she indicated that her body image and eating concerns had only recently started to slightly dissipate. Furthermore, she remained especially sensitive to teasing about her appearance from friends.

In sum, due to bullying related to their physique, a number of participants were unhappy with the size and shape of their bodies and resultantly developed unhealthy eating behaviors, and lost weight with the hope that being thinner would increase their social acceptance. Although participants found that losing weight did improve their social status in secondary school, the

approval felt conditional on being thin, and their body image insecurities and problematic eating behaviors continued into early adulthood.

Relating to others. Participants reported that the bullying they experienced led them to lose trust in others, fear confrontation, and negatively influenced their friendships and intimate relationships. Losing trust in others was mainly discussed by heterosexual participants. For example, a masculine gendered heterosexual participant reported,

> I think I just lost more faith in the goodness of people, I guess I was less trusting after that… Again, what they said [about my being lesbian] didn't really bug me, but… how people acted really bothered me and the fact that they could say those things or act that way… I can't even fathom doing that to someone else and just thinking "Wow, like other people **do** have that capacity" was eye-opening.

She further stated,

> My mom was a single teen mom and my dad obviously skipped out… but anyway so it was kind of like my trust in people sticking around or being reliable has just kind of along the way been chopped at. So I guess I tell you that to illustrate that [the bullying] compounded that mistrust in people's actions.

Another masculine gendered heterosexual participant described how the bullying she experienced affected her trust in men in particular,

> I only think about it now that I'm older… but really the aspect that I had so much hatred toward my father and really didn't have male figures... [because] most of the bullying and sexuality stuff happened with boys you know... I don't know if I hated all men, but I very much didn't feel safe around men. And then, when [the bullying] started to take on a sexual tone it was that much more hurtful to me. So, because there were issues of sexual abuse with my father it was that much [worse], I was really aware of it from a young age whereas [the boys who bullied me] might not have been because, you know, I knew all the terms because I'd been listening to it in court. So it was kind of that much more hurtful. But they couldn't possibly have known.

She further explained how her mistrust of men was sustained to the present, "I mean, I still have an unhealthy relationship with men..." Similarly, a feminine gendered heterosexual participant reported,

> I think having my name brought up so much when I was younger as a constant joke sort of made me… mature a lot faster… I take things a lot more seriously now. And especially my relationships I take more seriously than a lot of people do just because I find that sometimes I have trust issues in relationships with guys and that sort of thing…

A neutral gendered bisexual participant also discussed losing trust in others. For example,

> And it's weird because I mean obviously no one would ever treat me like [the bullies did] now because people grow up and also just cause like I do know myself so well and I am so self-assured that it just wouldn't and couldn't happen, but I still behave as if I'm expecting it from people because I always will be, you know?

As shown in the above quotes, the experience of being bullied in secondary school made participants wary of trusting others thereafter. The heterosexual participants reported feeling especially reticent to trust men due to either difficult experience with the men in their family, or having been bullied by boys in secondary school. For the bisexual participant, the relentless bullying she experienced in secondary school led her to be distrustful of both men and women and to expect that she would be treated poorly by people in general.

In addition to mistrust of others, participants discussed wanting to maintain social acceptance in their friendships, particularly by avoiding confrontational interactions. For example a masculine gendered lesbian participant reported,

> I've always kind of been a pushover. I hate confrontations… I can't figure out if that's one of the reasons why I didn't talk to [my friends that were bullying me or] if I didn't talk to them because they were training me not to fight back—but if I can avoid it I will, and that still affects my friendships now because if someone's doing something that annoys me and… any other person would be like, "Hey, can you stop that?" I still usually can't do it. Or if I do, it takes me weeks to build myself up to the point… so [it's] something I'm trying to work on.

Additionally, a masculine gendered heterosexual participant also described, "I feel like I don't have any real good coping mechanisms for [dealing] with confrontation even with family and friends… I don't really know how to handle something other than to just not react, you know?" The same participant also provided another example of avoiding confrontation during a more

recent experience, “I had a really negative relationship with a group of people in my dorm... And like I said I don’t have coping mechanisms so my only thing was to hide in my room...”

As a result of the rejection and cruelty that the participants experienced in secondary school, sustaining social acceptance and relational stability became extremely important to them. As such, a number of participants reported that as adults, they have avoided confronting others due to fear of damaging their relationships. The participants reported feeling uncomfortable voicing their opinions or asserting their needs, so instead they would retreat, accept poor treatment, or wait a long time before raising concerns with others and deal with a buildup of resentment or other emotions. A number of the participants identified the fear of confrontation as something they wanted to improve upon.

Participants also discussed the influence of the bullying on their relationships. For instance, a masculine gendered heterosexual participant discussed how the bullying affected her friendships. As she explained,

> So I started the new school and I met a bunch of really awesome people. And then about half-way through 9th grade... I just kind of snapped again and went like alpha-female and stuck that way for a good chunk of the rest of high school. So I ended up with this weird, conglomerate dual personality, where to certain people I would be myself and then all of a sudden I would go into phases of completely ignoring them, and take on this alternate persona where I was hyper-female, little-miss-popular, everyone loves me.

The same participant also reported,

> So that thing that happened at the beginning of 9th grade also kind of happened again at the beginning of university, where in the first 6 months I met a bunch of really awesome people. But I guess one my good friends from high school was still here and since I’d become really good friends with her while I was sort of in socially acceptable mode, she didn’t really fit in with the group of people that I’d found, and I didn’t have the confidence to be like “Okay, I’ll move away from my high school friends,” so instead I leeched onto my high school friends and ended up basically not speaking to the really awesome people I’d met in the beginning of first year for the rest of university.

Evidently, being bullied led this participant to prioritize friendships with "socially acceptable" or "popular" peers in secondary school rather than with people with similar interests and qualities as her, and she continued to do this in university. Maintaining friendships with people who were popular provided reassurance that she was meeting the dominant social expectations, which was a way to safeguard against being bullied in the future. Nevertheless, she was then forced to forego the opportunity to connect with people with whom she likely had more in common.

A neutral gendered bisexual participant also reported that the bullying she experienced influenced her intimate relationships during secondary school, as well as in later years. As she reported,

> In hindsight I see that [the bullying] totally destroyed what could have been a really nice relationship between me and my girlfriend… Eventually I did dump her, because… I was embarrassed. That's actually what it came to. That I was actually embarrassed about being gay… and no one would take me seriously… At the time I pretended it was all her fault because she was a big embarrassment. But in hindsight obviously it wasn't. This poor girl, she was really sweet and nice, and it could have been great if I just had the balls to actually not be affected by the bullying

She further reported,

> One thing I would add is that not only did I break up with her, but I did very much lose interest in girls for a long time… as in I would tell people I was bisexual openly, because I felt like that was a part of me. But the idea of being with a girl kind of freaked me out. And even though I was attracted to certain girls, I was like no way... I'm not going to go through that... [though]in my third school there was a girl who also was bisexual… and she really liked me and I liked her, and we kissed once, but even then I was like no, this is not going to happen… and so I basically cut myself off from her entirely. I think that it might have had to do with the fact that the one time I did have a relationship [with a girl] it was sabotaged by everyone around me... and then ever since I've had a boyfriend...

As shown in the above quotes, this participant ended her relationship with her girlfriend in secondary school in attempt to reduce the bullying that was being targeted at her. Not only did she regret the breakup, she did not feel comfortable dating women soon thereafter.

Influence on Values and Understanding of Society

Participants reported that their experiences of bullying; (a) increased their awareness of bullying as a social problem with damaging consequences, (b) shaped the development of their core values, and (c) influenced their perception of gender norms in society.

Bullying as a social problem. Participants reported that the bullying they experienced made them keenly aware of bullying as a social problem that continues to negatively affect others, especially youth. Moreover, having this awareness made participants more sensitive to the feelings of others and less tolerant of bullying in general. For example, a heterosexual participant reported,

> I definitely think that my experience gave me a perspective on the things that people go through, especially people who are gay or lesbian… I mean, I'm not, so I don't think [the bullying] had as much of a psychological impact as it could have if the things [said] were actually true about me. But I mean for sure it opened my eyes.

As the participant just described, the bullying she experienced, which was focused on the bullies' presumption that she was lesbian, helped her recognize the prevalence of bullying toward LGBTQ individuals and its potentially harmful effects. Also, a neutral gendered bisexual participant stated, "I think that [the bullying] has made me a better person because I'm more aware of these things, and how they can hurt people… I think that's an important quality in life to know that." Further, a feminine gendered heterosexual participant discussed becoming increasingly intolerant of bullying toward others. As she stated,

> Afterwards it made me a lot more intolerant to bullying. I've been a camp counsellor for 3 years and now when I see bullying going on I don't stand for it because I know what it felt like to be that person and I'm not going to be passive and just let that happen…

As the participants' words illustrated, they remained sensitive to bullying as an ongoing societal problem, even though they were no longer being targeted themselves. Based on having had peers disregard their feelings in the past, participants became more sensitive to how their words

and actions can impact others. Moreover, they developed a sense of responsibility to intervene when they witnessed others being bullied rather than standing by as passive bystanders.

Values. Participants reported that the bullying they experienced influenced the values they embraced as adults. Values described by participants included, open mindedness and acceptance of diversity, creating meaningful relationships, and helping others through their career.

Open mindedness and acceptance of diversity. Developing greater open mindedness and acceptance of others were values discussed by a number of participants. In this regard, one participant reported,

> I think [the bullying] made me more tolerant of anything different than me, be it race, ethnicity, or sexuality… Going through [the bullying]… made me realize how horrible it is to judge someone and their value based on something that they can't change, in my case something that you're not sure of… So it made me take a step back and try and be open and accepting of anyone… and kind of check myself whenever I would make value judgments about people and I would be like you don't know who they are. You don't know what they're experiencing inside. You don't know anything. So I think it's helped me make a lot of friends that… I might not necessarily have been open to being friends with… I think in the long run it's actually been good for me in that sense.

Similarly, another participant reported,

> So in terms of general personality things there's definitely… a high level of acceptance of diversity that's come out of [the bullying experiences]. There's kind of this realization that like if I thought those things were wrong about myself and they turned out to be perfectly okay, then if this person is interested in really strange things then awesome, that's great. As long as it is something their interested in then I'm sure it's a valid thing to be interested in…So that's definitely an open-mindedness that's come out of all of this.

Creating meaningful relationships. In addition to greater open mindedness and acceptance of diversity, a couple of participants felt that as a result of their bullying experiences they gained greater awareness of what is important to them in their relationships with others. For example, one participant discussed the importance of having trust in her relationships,

> When I do find a relationship even with just my friends that I trust, I try to hold onto it because it doesn't happen to me that often. So I think in that sense it's kind of changed my perspectives on relationships, which a lot of people my age don't have.

Furthermore, in discussing what she values in relationships, another participant focused on the importance of equality. As she stated, "My experience [with bullying] makes me see relationships differently, and see how equal the roles [between men and women] should be…"

Career involving helping others. As a distinct finding, a participant discussed how the bullying she experienced provoked a desire to help others and to strive toward a career in a helping-related field. For example,

> [The bullying] also changed what I wanted to do for my career… I always thought that I wanted to go into accounting or business… and then after [dealing with bullying] and kind of reflecting on it… I got [to university] and now I'm going to major in cognitive science with my major aspect of it in psychology. I find it really interesting now, just being able to help people so they don't have to go through the same thing.

Overall, participants reported that their values were highly influenced by having dealt with bullying in secondary school. Consequently, they tried not to make assumptions about others before getting to know them, were more open to befriending and accepting people with very different backgrounds from them, tried to establish relationships based on trust and equality, and one participant developed a desire to help others through her career.

Societal gender norms. Some participants who presented in a masculine or neutral gendered way reported that the bullying they experienced increased their awareness of societal gender norms. Specifically, they focused on how their experiences of bullying illuminated the pressure placed on women to dress and behave in stereotypically feminine ways and to meet heterosexist standards for attractiveness. Regarding the pressures on women to behave in a feminine way, a masculine gendered lesbian participant reported,

> [In high school] I was seen as this butch, masculine person. Which I've never felt that I was. And then I had these times where I'd be like, Should I embrace it? And then I'd get,

> you know, the wallet with the chain and try to get more masculine. I was like, I just won't care. And then other times I'd want to try to change it. And then when I came to [name of city where she attends university] finally I couldn't walk around wearing jeans and a t-shirt. I felt so out of place. It's fancier. But, up until then that's what most of [the bullying] was based around I think.

This participant further stated,

> I've worked now to conform more and dress more feminine, and I still don't wear makeup and I never do my hair or anything. But just in terms of my wardrobe I've worked [on it]… and still compared to what your standard person in [name of city where she attends university] would wear it's nothing. But compared to what I would have worn before, you know, if I'm wearing a t-shirt it's fitted now instead of some guys' shirt 2 sizes too big. And I think some of it is because I'm afraid of what will happen if I stand out too much… I think I've done a lot to try to change how I present to others.

Ultimately, this participant was bullied by peers in secondary school for their perception of her as masculine, which made it difficult for her explore and identify her preferred gender presentation. Subsequently, when she moved to a more cosmopolitan city for university, she felt even greater pressure to dress more femininely. So despite her actual preference to wear more masculine clothes, she changed to a slightly more feminine style in order to stand out less and avoid harassment. Similarly, a masculine gendered bisexual participant reported,

> Obviously in terms of fitting the physical mold I'm not tall, I wasn't thin, I didn't wear make-up. I wasn't a girly-girl in the traditional sense. When I started high school I wasn't concerned with my appearance. I wasn't even cognizant of it… I didn't understand the concept of doing your hair and make-up and trying to look pretty. I didn't care. I just wanted to play soccer. So it made me more aware… of femininity in general and of different people's interpretations of it… It's kind of funny because in the world of the straight girls there's this one ideal of the skinny pretty girl that the boys want. But in the world of the bisexual or the gay woman there's a spectrum… I mean, there's that archetype of the skinny pretty girl but there's definitely other images and certain people favor those things. So it was eye-opening to see, you know, I'm not that [skinny, pretty girl] and that's okay cause… I don't have to fit into this one little pinhole, nor do I have to fit into any of these other 10 but it's amazing that they even exist. And I can just be and look the way I want and someone out there is going to find me attractive. So learning about femininity and sexuality and seeing that there's other gender roles than just the initial exposure to these girls' opinions and little bubble [at school]…

During secondary school, this participant also became increasingly aware of the gender norms for women and the pressure to fit into a certain mold for attractiveness. Over time, however, she became aware of how such standards are socially defined, which helped her develop greater comfort and confidence with her preferred masculine gender presentation.

Uniquely, a neutral gendered heterosexual participant focused more on the influence of the bullying on her understanding of gender role expectations for men and women in society, as well as her values in this regard,

> I have very strong values… especially about sexuality, and [the bullying experiences] definitely helped me with that because I saw the other side of the spectrum in what my friends,[the girls who were bullying me], were doing. I developed the kind of values where I don't take pride if a guy looks at me in a certain way. And that has been deeply instilled in me because I see why those girls [who bullied me] were like that. They were just looking for someone to make them feel nice and if I have other ways of doing that then I don't need to wear shorter skirts… I think one of the things for me is that I wasn't going to have a conversation with a guy and try to seem dumb or flirt with him the way a lot of the girls did... I see how those girls turned out because of how much they tried to be accepted by guys. So I'll never sound dumb around a guy... I think that's embarrassing.

As a result of the bullying, this participant gained greater awareness of the power dynamics between men and women in society, wherein girls and women have been socialized to focus on their sexual attractiveness to men, particularly as a way to measure their personal value, which is a pattern that she does not wish to replicate.

Having been bullied in secondary school for their gender expression and how others perceived their sexual orientation, these participants became highly attuned to societal expectations for how women should act, look, and relate to others, which influenced their values as adults. These participants experienced first-hand the enormous pressure placed on women and girls to perform their gender in a traditionally feminine way, and the social alienation and violence that ensued as a consequence of failing to do so. As a result of experiencing such oppression, a masculine gendered lesbian participant realized that she had to choose between

presenting her gender in her preferred way and maintaining her safety. Additionally, a masculine gendered bisexual participant gained awareness of the socially constructed nature of gender norms, which empowered her to see that women can diverge from the patriarchal, heterosexist box they are expected to fit and can still be appreciated as individuals. Thus, she came to value taking a more critical perspective to examine societal standards. As well, a neutral gendered heterosexual participant grew to value having equal relationships with men, as she recognized how the girls that bullied her and women in general are oppressed by determining their worth through male-defined standards of suitability.

Coping with Bullying

Participants discussed a number of ways in which they coped with the bullying, which included seeking positive attention from peers, turning into a bully themselves, engaging in extracurricular activities and hobbies, maintaining a positive attitude, and trying to change aspects of themselves.

Seeking positive attention. A couple of participants reported that they coped with the bullying at school by trying to attract more positive attention to themselves at school through talents they possessed, like artistic ability or humor. In this regard, a neutral gendered bisexual participant reported,

> It was a really interesting dynamic I had at school because I had this thing where I was constantly being bullied and stuff but at the same time was known for being a really good artist and really smart… and I would speak up in classes now and then and say something to the teacher that would be deeply sarcastic and really funny and so everyone knew I was funny and I could always make everyone laugh so it was just kind of an interesting situation. I was totally not class clown… it totally didn't happen that often cause I was like petrified but every now and then… it was an interesting dichotomy.

The same participant also stated, "I would always… Bring a sketchbook to every class and draw a lot. Which also just generated a lot of positive attention because I was really good." A

masculine gendered heterosexual participant also discussed using her talent in art to get positive feedback from her peers, "doing art [was important]... because even if people didn't really like me, they'd still be like 'Oh, wow, whatever you drew was really impressive'"

Bullying others. Apart from trying to increase the amount of positive attention obtained from peers, a few heterosexual and bisexual participants reported that one of the ways they coped with bullying involved bullying others. However, looking back on the experiences, bullying others was not something that the participants felt positively about. For example, a neutral gendered heterosexual participant reported,

> There was another girl in the group who was really into horses and so she was not into hanging out on the weekends. She was really busy and so it was easy for her to be at the bottom of the group and so it became a lot easier to talk about her and to be mean to someone else because I didn't want [them] to talk about me… I think I did [that] to deflect it because then I felt better. Like if we can talk about this person and not focus on me then I'm doing okay… That's disappointing...

Additionally, a masculine gendered heterosexual participant reported, "I was just so angry... So like with friends I'd be nasty and you know sometimes I'd turn into a bully. I mean I knew how to give it out just as well as I got it." A neutral gendered bisexual participant also discussed how she bullied a friend. For example,

> In 7th grade and late 6th grade I definitely would say I bullied a girl who was my friend in that class… I didn't really see it as bullying because we were friends and I kind of just saw it as me being a jerk. I would just do a lot of stuff like… I would take her hat and then run around the school yard and she couldn't really run as fast as me to catch it and get it back because she was a lot heavier than me, but I didn't really perceive that. I wasn't like, "Hahaha I'm going to do this cause she's fat." I was just like "I'm going to do this cause I'm annoying and she can't get it. That's funny." Or… I think another thing that I'd done because of my situation was that I tried to cut out people that I felt were causing extra negative attention to be drawn towards me like this [friend] and then at one point in 7th grade she was like, "I have to pick something up from home [during lunch] can you come home with me. I don't feel like going alone." I was like, "No" and she was like, "I'll give you a toonie" and I was like "Ok!" which later seemed like the meanest thing in the world to make someone do. So I think that another thing is just that I took it out on anyone I considered more vulnerable than me. Which is unfortunate, but… I'm aware… [that] a reaction to my own bullying was to be a bully to this girl.

Participants who bullied their friends at school reported that this helped them cope with their own bullying experiences. In other words, they perceived that by bullying others, they were deflecting negative attention away from themselves or preventing further harassment that might result from associating with friends who were also marginalized at school. Although they understood the function of bullying others during secondary school, looking back on this as adults, they were disappointed in themselves and viewed their actions as callous.

Extracurricular activities and hobbies. A number of heterosexual and bisexual participants reported that they immersed themselves in extracurricular activities or engaged in hobbies that they enjoyed outside of school as a way of coping with bullying. These activities served as an escape from the negativity of the bullying. Activities and hobbies included figure skating, singing, horseback riding, reading, and having an after school job. For example, a feminine gendered heterosexual participant reported that figure skating and singing were positive outlets that gave her an escape from the bullying,

> I figure skated until the end of grade 10. So I would just do that a lot, like 4 or 5 times a week. And I guess when I would skate or when I would do jumps or spins or that kind of thing I would just throw myself into them to get some of like my frustrations out. And then I'm also a classical singer, and I would just sing all the time and just try to like dissolve myself into that world to escape my academic one.

Additionally, for a number of participants reading was an important form of escape from bullying. As a neutral gendered heterosexual participant reported,

> I would escape by reading because then I could say "Oh, you know, I'm reading a really good book. That is making me happy" whereas like, "We were supposed to hang out and then I know she just never called me" things like that. And so it was a good way to distract myself.

Additionally, a neutral gendered bisexual participant discussed both reading and writing in her journal as methods of coping. She reported that she strongly related to the characters in the books she read. For example,

> I read and wrote all the time as a result… [I read] about role models in similar positions…[characters] like…what's her face…like Harriet the Spy or Buffy the Vampire Slayer or like Daria. You know there's such a shortage of people to look up to when you're in the specific position I was in and… I felt kind of like that was just my place you know to be among those types of people and characters.

In the books mentioned by the participant, the female protagonists were alienated by peers at school, but were also fascinating, heroic characters. Reading such stories helped the participant cope with the bullying by making her feel less alone, as the fact that these characters were created and gained popularity among readers implied that others in the world must also be having similar experiences and feelings as her. The stories also helped her cope by providing role models, though fictional, who were also tormented at school and surmounted the negative circumstances.

In addition to reading, some participants reported how working was a retreat from school and home. For example, a neutral gendered bisexual participant explained,

> When school became kind of hostile… I would just go to work and I worked 30 hours a week at a tea shop. Yah, I was like a barista essentially and I would work from 3:00 until like 11:00 in the evening and... work was a really happy place, because I was the youngest person there and all these cool university girls were working there. And it was just more inspirational cause I was like I get to be one of these girls…

For this participant, having a job provided a place for her to spend time outside of school and home, as well as a feeling of acceptance from her co-workers.

In sum, the activities mentioned by the participants gave them a much needed break from thinking about and dealing with the bullying. Specifically, engaging in these activities provided them with the chance to enjoy themselves, connect with people, have a sense of mastery, or feel

less alone in their circumstances. As such, having hobbies outside school was a useful and valuable strategy that helped the participants cope with being bullied at school.

Maintaining a positive attitude. Bisexual as well as heterosexual participants reported that they coped with bullying by trying to maintain a positive attitude. Some of the ways they stayed positive included attributing the bullying to factors within the bullies rather than putting the blame on themselves, focusing on having a better future after secondary school, denying the negative effects of bullying, and remaining true to themselves.

Attributing fault to bullies. A number of participants reported that identifying the negative attributes of the bullies and not blaming themselves for the bullying was a way of coping. For example, a masculine gendered bisexual participant reported,

> I guess internally I would try and either put it out of my mind or kind of rationalize their motivation. Like, oh, they're doing it because… they need to fit in… and as much as it is a direct attack on me, part of it isn't. I'm just the target and I'm convenient and I happen to be there." So I would try and talk myself through it in that sense. And be positive and, you know, reconfirm my self-worth… It was more… just trying to take a step back and be objective and look at it from an outsider's perspective and say, this is what's happening. This is why it's happening. This is who you are. This is why it's okay, and move on.

Similarly, a masculine gendered heterosexual participant stated, "It's mostly just... inner strength and knowing that... what [the bullies] said isn't true or how they acted isn't proper... it wasn't my fault or something that I did, it was just them being assholes." Similarly, a neutral gendered heterosexual participant reported,

> [Dealing with bullying] was definitely tough, but… instead of blaming myself I would just blame [the bullies]. I would just be like, well, you guys aren't very nice. And I think that's probably a way that I differ from most people... I think a lot of people would say like "I'm fat" or "I am weird" or "I'm too much of a nerd" and I didn't go that direction. So, that's probably what got me through it because being negative would have had a different effect on me…

Despite the negative, damaging messages received from the bullies, some participants recognized that the problem did not lie within themselves but within the bullies. In other words, they keenly discerned that the bullying was related to the motivations and attributes of the bullies, and they postulated that those who would perpetrate such violence were likely troubled or lacking in other important qualities needed to thrive in life. Having the insight that the bullying was related to factors within the bullies allowed them to preserve some of their self-worth, fostered their resilience, helped them maintain a positive attitude, and thus represented a vital method of coping with the bullying.

Denying the effects of bullying. Certain heterosexual participant reported that they coped with the bullying by denying that it was affecting them and trying to move on from it. For example, a masculine gendered heterosexual participant reported, "I can't really remember going through a grieving process or, a really hard time with it. I just kind of chalked it up for what it was and kind of pushed it under the rug and kept going." Another masculine gendered heterosexual participant reported,

> So at the time I, I didn't deal with it. I just assumed that it would end at some point and didn't really understand the concept that psychological things linger with you. I really just saw it as this is now and later will be later and I can just chunk out this period of time and ignore that it ever happened. Brains don't work like that. I know that now.

As illustrated here, participants tried not to dwell on their bullying experiences or how they were affected by them at the time it occurred. Denying the negative effects of the bullying allowed the participants to continue functioning in hostile school climates where they were repeatedly belittled. Additionally, discounting the harmfulness of the bullying helped them to maintain hope that if they could make it through secondary school, things would improve and bullying would be a distant memory. However, using this denial or minimization strategy prevented the participants from fully acknowledging their emotional reactions to the bullying and seeking

support from others, which left them feeling alone in their experience. In point of fact, they did not discuss the bullying until entering university. Once in university, the participants realized that ignoring the effects of the bullying did not negate its destructive influence, so while it was a partially helpful method of coping in secondary school, it was ineffective long term.

Focusing on the future. Another way of coping mentioned by a couple of bisexual participants was to envision a better future for themselves that did not involve bullying. For example, a neutral gendered bisexual participant stated, "I was like, oh I'm getting out of my home, and I get to just move out and forget about this place in a lot of ways." Additionally, a masculine gendered participant reported, "I saw the high school as just like this artificial bubble and thought I just need to get through this and it's going to be okay… and I'll never have to see those girls again." Clearly, participants tried to concentrate on the positive things that lay ahead for them in the future, namely, leaving secondary school and not having to deal with bullying anymore. Although focusing on getting out of their secondary schools allowed the participants to uphold faith and optimism while under arduous circumstances, it inhibited them from identifying and taking advantage of resources or people around them that could offer some reprieve from the bullying while it was occurring. As described in other sections, having this future orientation became habitual for some participants, such that even after secondary school they constantly felt pressured to be preparing for the future and struggled to feel grounded and calm in their present contexts.

Staying true to oneself. A couple of participants who identified as sexual minorities reported that remaining true to themselves rather than trying to change or deny certain aspects of their identities was one way that they dealt with the bullying. For instance, a masculine gendered bisexual participant reported,

> That's what I'm the most proud of, I guess, is that I never tried to pretend that I was someone that I wasn't. And I never tried to fit in. And I never, you know, lied or tried to sweep things under the rug. Or, I never tried to change and be someone that I wasn't, so I think that part of the response is what I'm happy with and it helped me be who I am today.

Additionally, a masculine gendered lesbian participant reported,

> I didn't want to flaunt [my sexual identity] in grade 8 cause it was so weird and new and scary… and I knew I would get into trouble and then…in later grades… [I was] like, yes… that is a part of my identity… I'm going to be super gay and… I think I wore the rainbow and stuff… which then leads to people talking about it more when it's more obvious in your appearance or whatever… [but] I was like, that's the sexuality I was born with. That's fine.

As the participants described, they coped with the bullying by remaining their authentic selves rather than trying to blend in with their peers or deny their sexual identity. Choosing to stay true to oneself while being bullied took great courage and resilience, as it meant that they would continue to stand out as different at school and be at risk of further bullying. These participants benefited from their approach of authenticity, as it prompted them to reflect upon, understand, and accept their identities (sexual and otherwise) at an earlier point in their development. Looking back on their experiences, these participants recognized that the decision to be their authentic selves positively influenced them as adults by making them more self-assured and comfortable in their own skin, which gave them a sense of pride.

In sum, the participants attempted to keep a positive outlook to deal with the bullying at school, and they employed a variety of strategies to achieve this. Participants coped with the bullying by refraining from blaming themselves, denying the ways in which the bullying negatively affected them, and focusing on having a better future after secondary school. Additionally, some sexual minority participants dealt with the bullying by staying true to themselves rather than denying their sexual identity or trying to blend in with their peers. By using the above strategies, participants attempted to continue functioning in their daily lives with

some sense of normalcy, uphold their self-esteem, remain true to themselves, and stay hopeful about the future. Although these strategies had advantages and disadvantages, they were critical in helping the participants survive and persevere through secondary school, and are therefore a testament to their resilience and strength.

Disclosing bullying to family members. An additional way that some participants coped with bullying was by seeking support from parents. However, not all participants revealed to their parents that they were being bullied. In fact, regardless of sexual orientation, a number of participants reported that they did not disclose their bullying experiences to their parents, and they identified various reasons for this decision, which will be discussed below.

Reasons that participants gave for not informing their parents about the bullying included not wanting to worry them, being dissatisfied with how their parents dealt with a different situation which they had disclosed to them previously, perceiving that the bullying was not troublesome enough to warrant telling their parents, feeling ashamed to admit the difficulties they were facing, and feeling that it was unsafe to talk about the bullying since it related to their sexual orientation.

Often times, participants mentioned multiple reasons for not discussing the bullying with their parents. For example, a masculine gendered heterosexual participant explained,

> My parents I didn't tell because I already had enough drama going on that year with my friend who was cutting… and I mean it's not really something that you bring up later like, 'hey, by the way,' I don't know. I just haven't really bothered. I mean it doesn't bug me on a day-to-day basis… I don't know. I didn't want to make [my parents] worry I guess or seem overly dramatic or anything like that…

As described in the in the above quote, the participant did not divulge the bullying during high school to her parents because she did not want to worry them, she did not feel it was upsetting enough to warrant telling them, and she was unhappy with how they handled a disclosure she

had made about her friend engaging in self-harm. A masculine gendered bisexual participant also discussed not sharing with her parents that she was being bullied in secondary school because she did not want to worry them. For example,

> I didn't really talk about [the bullying] with my parents cause… they're really open and accepting and, and they were like 'Have a girlfriend. Have a boyfriend. Do whatever you want. Figure it out. It's all good. Just, you know, be with a good person who likes you and respects you' and that was amazing. And, because they were so supportive I almost didn't want to talk to them about what was happening because I'm sure it was hard for them, to a certain extent, so I didn't want to make them feel bad for me. You know, I didn't want them to worry about me. So I didn't really talk about it with them ever.

Although the participant's parents directly expressed acceptance of her, she still suspected that having a daughter who identifies as bisexual was difficult for them in certain ways, and she did not want them to be concerned about her.

In addition to not wanting to worry their parents, a neutral gendered heterosexual participant explained that she did not tell her parents about the bullying because she felt ashamed to admit that she was having social difficulties. For example, "I've always been kind of proud so I didn't do that. I wouldn't openly admit [the bullying] to them." Even so, her parents sensed she was going through social difficulties without her openly disclosing it. As she stated,

> [My parents] didn't express anything for a while. I think they would make remarks sometimes... They definitely wanted to let me do my own thing... maybe they tried to bring it up with me but... it wasn't very direct. It was more just like 'You know we love you and, you know, you're so good at school and... and hey, don't worry [that] you didn't get invited to this thing.' If they... suspected I was in a worse mood because I had been left out, they would make sure to be nice.

As shown in this quote, the participant perceived that her parents tried to be supportive when they discerned that she was being bullied but did not urge her to discuss it.

Additionally, a masculine gendered lesbian participant discussed how she chose not to discuss the bullying with her family members because the bullying had been focused on her sexual orientation. After her school administrators "outed" her to her parents about her lesbian

sexual orientation, her sexuality was not a topic that she felt safe bringing up at home. As she stated,

> I didn't tell my parents the level of bullying I was receiving in grade 8 because I already understood that talking about it would get me in more trouble which is what had happened with the administration so… I didn't want to talk to my parents about stuff like that… it was so fresh and you don't want to talk about anything relating to your personal relationships or sexuality with your parents when you're that age… And then I guess in high school I kind of let it be known to my mom that I didn't feel great all the time. That I did stick out… maybe not in such concrete terms but…but I just always gave her the sense that I did not like being in school that much… I did not get along with other people.

As shown in the above quotes, some participants chose not to tell their parents that they were being bullied at school; a decision which they made for a variety of reasons and which depended upon their particular circumstances. Consequently, the possibility of obtaining parental support or assistance advocating for their rights with school authorities was virtually quashed. Furthermore, although some parents suspected that their daughters were being bullied despite not being informed of it directly, the extent to which they could help was reduced since they were not fully informed of the situation. Still, some participants felt that not telling their parents about the bullying would protect them from feeling negatively judged and unsafe at home, and from their parents intervening in unwanted ways. In the end, the participants successfully avoided such scenarios at home and it is impossible to know if the result would have been better, worse, or as they expected had they disclosed the bullying.

Certain participants chose to share with their parents or other family members that they were being bullied at school and they obtained a variety of responses. Some participants felt that their family members' responses were supportive, and others reported that the responses they received resulted in them to feeling responsible for the bullying.

The participants who felt that their family members' responses were supportive identified as heterosexual, though they expressed their gender in different ways. For example, a feminine gendered heterosexual participant reported,

> I told my mom about [the bullying], and she talked to the administration, who didn't do anything… she was like "You need to keep a more active role in what's going on and make sure that… you keep an eye out." And they never really did anything and she was like "Okay, well give it time. Maybe they're just implementing new policies or something" and then by that time it was… beginning of grade 9… And by then I was just kind of like "you know what, I'm leaving in a year so whatever."

The same participant also told her brother about the bullying,

> Me and my brother …. became really close so I would talk to him about [the bullying] too, cause he kind of went through a similar thing… [his perspective was] to just keep doing what I was doing cause… We both went to this school at the very beginning and then we were both kind of ugly and fat and that kind of thing, and then we both just shot up. So he went through the exact same thing like 3 years earlier than I did. So he would help me through it, and he would just kind of talk to me and be like 'Look at me now. You'll get through it…' So he'd just kind of be positive encouragement.

As this participant discussed, her mother intervened with the administration of her school on her behalf after finding out about the bullying, and her brother provided positive encouragement. Additionally, a masculine gendered heterosexual participant reported,

> I'm always grateful that I've had a very supportive family... I mean, I don't really know how much I discussed [the bullying] with my mom in terms of I'm upset about it, more just I'd let her know it was happening and she would just be like, you know, don't worry about it. She tried to be really helpful and everything. I mean, she was aware but... she was very much of the school of thought of I had to work it out myself. You know, she was not the kind of mom who's going to run and go to the school and try to fight my bullies for me. Which I greatly credit her for because I feel I can handle myself in social situations and stuff because of it.

As the participants' quotes reveal, they felt comfortable speaking to their mothers about the bullying they were experiencing at school and one of them also discussed it with her brother who had also dealt with bullying. By turning to their family members, these participants obtained validation of their worth as people, encouragement to help them persevere, reassurance that the

situation would improve over time, and assistance interfacing with school authorities. Although the family members of these participants responded to the bullying in different ways, both young women perceived that their family members cared about their wellbeing and that they could reveal the problems at school without negative repercussions.

A number of masculine and neutral gendered heterosexual and bisexual participants reported that they disclosed the bullying to certain family members and their responses increased their distress. For example, a masculine gendered heterosexual participant reported,

> In a lot of ways my mom didn't help because her solution for [the bullying] was to find me girlier clothing and suggest that I wear makeup or straighten my hair or things like that, which kind of reinforced the message of the reason you're getting bullied is because of you- And if you could just... stop liking those things then everything would be better… which… is… difficult to deal with because it takes a great deal of confidence to say, "No, I like these things and there's nothing wrong with that." When to a certain extent people are right. If you started wearing girlier clothing then a lot of the problems do go away, or at least you can cope with them better because then when people call you butch you can be like "What are you talking about? I'm wearing a skirt." As opposed to just the correct response of "No, you're being a little bit pig-headed. Please stop saying things that make no sense."

As shown in this quote, the participant's mother's response to the bullying was to suggest that her daughter try to look more feminine. Consequently, the participant blamed herself for the bullying, viewing it as a product of her being inherently unacceptable. In line with the messages she received from her mother and from the bullies at school that made fun of her because they thought she was too masculine, she came to believe that the only way to gain social approval was to lose weight, dress and act more femininely, and fit in with popular peers. As previously discussed, she continued to struggle to accept her own identity as an adult.

Bisexual participants also discussed obtaining responses from family members who suggested that they should change aspects of themselves to deal with bullying. As described by a neutral gendered bisexual participant,

> My mom knew [about the bullying], but she knew since grade one and she's been telling me to lose weight since grade one. She actually was visiting me [at university] in July and she was telling….she kept telling me to lose weight… cause I still don't really fit like the Asian 5'3" 100 pounds thing…

She further added:

> Well I think my dad knew [about the bullying] but he didn't really care… [since] he also came to [name of participant's university] and told me I still have to lose weight too so I think both my parents just thought [being bullied] was motivation for me to lose weight.

As shown here, after finding out about the bullying, the participant's mother and father both encouraged her to lose weight. She understood their response as being related to the fact that she did not fit the feminine gender norms for her Asian background. Regarding her reaction to her parent's feedback she stated, "My parents could have been supportive like in some small way instead of just telling me to lose weight, but…well…they still aren't so…There's not much I can do about that."

For the participant just described, being repeatedly told by her parents that she needed to lose weight negatively affected her on multiple levels. Namely, in addition to feeling blamed for the bullying she endured, the messages telling her to lose weight led her to feel that acceptance from her parents and peers was dependent upon her being thin, that she was falling short as a woman, and particularly as an Asian woman as a result of her size. Thus, she not only experienced her parents as unsupportive, but as highly critical.

Similar to the participant just described, another neutral gendered bisexual participant also discussed how her mother's response to finding out about the bullying at school was to attribute it to her appearance and identity. For example,

> [My mother and sisters] didn't know the reasons [for the bullying]. They didn't know when it was about my body and stuff… so my mom would give me a lot of difficulty. I would be made fun of [at school] for not shaving my legs or my underarms and when I begged my mother to buy me a razor she would give me a lot of trouble for it and tell me that I shouldn't be doing that because it'll grow back ugly and thick which she was super

> concerned with. She would always be like, "Why do you make yourself a freak" and like, "be more normal" but any time I tried in misguided desperation to do anything deemed normal like buy new clothes she would get angry about it and be like "why are you trying to… follow the hoard"… she was really snooty about that because she'd been unpopular too and she would look down on anyone trying to follow a trend… there was inevitability a blockage of [my family's] ability to help me because like I said, when I was older a lot of [the bullying] was about things that they have the same values as. Like, they also thought I was a slutty stoner girl at the same time everyone in my school did even though I wasn't... So… even though my family would obviously not bully me they kind of… were coming from the same place [as the bullies].

The same participant also explained that both the values held by her mother, and her mother's response to the bullying fostered a home environment which felt unsafe and led her to recognize that she could not obtain the support she needed there. For example,

> **Participant:** Yeah it was a really complicated relationship with my family. It wasn't just blanket support… I don't think the word I would use would be supportive, especially because a lot of it was queerness related bullying which they're really not supportive of.
>
> **Interviewer:** They're not supportive of you identifying as queer? …Were they aware of that when you were in high school?
>
> **Participant:** They suspected it and fretted over it but one of my older sisters is a lesbian and when she came out to them they kicked her out of the house at 17 so… I didn't really feel the need to be like, "Oh hey me too" I was kind of like I'm just going to wait until this is really obvious and then. . . we don't really need to talk about it ever… Cause I never told them about that. I would never bring up that aspect of it.

As the participant described, she disclosed to her mother that she was being bullied at school, but not that it was focused on her bodily appearance or perceived sexual orientation. In turn, her mother responded with mixed messages, sometimes telling her to change her appearance to look and dress more like her peers, and other times communicating that emulating her peers and following trends was bad. Regardless of how her mother responded, the participant felt that she was similarly misjudged and misunderstood at home by her mother and at school. Ultimately, her mother's mixed messages about changing her appearance, in addition to the fact that her parents openly expressed anti-LGBTQ attitudes, led the participant to feel unsupported by her

mother in dealing with the bullying. The culmination of being bullied at school and being blamed by her mother for the bullying resulted in the participant feeling that there must be something innately wrong with her since she was rejected by peers in multiple schools and viewed as inadequate at home. Due to her school and home experiences, she started to expect to be treated poorly by others, an expectation that she continued to experience as an adult.

Unlike the accounts of others, a masculine gendered lesbian participant recalled that she initially shared with her mother that she was being bullied, but became increasingly private about it over time. As she stated, "My mom kind of knew in the sense that like [bullying] had always been going on… she just kind of picked up on it." This participant believed that her mother picked up on the bullying, in part because it was occurring since elementary school. Although in primary school the participant had obtained advice from her mother on how to handle the bullying (see section on *Immediate response to bullying*), she eventually stopped discussing it with her mother. As she stated,

> [My friends and I stayed in] our basement whenever we were hanging out, and so I think sometimes [my mom] would overhear something or some days I'd come home and I would be upset and sometimes I think I'd tell her what had happened that day. And from that she got a lot of books from the library on bullying… it was just the little things like that. And, as I went through high school, I think she caught on less and less because I stopped talking to her about it as much too… I don't think I was scared about her finding out about my sexuality or anything. I don't think I even really realized that that was where it was coming from at the time. But… we were actually having a rocky time around that period. I forget what had happened but… I wound up getting grounded for 8 months or something. I was really upset with them about that. And so there was probably this year/year and a half period where I just didn't talk to them very much at all.

Over time, the participant became progressively less open with her mother about the bullying she was facing, and she attributed this to fighting with her mother frequently about familial issues, and deterioration in the lines of communication between them. In light of the negative state of her relationship with her mother at that time, the participant was not seeking support from her for

the bullying. Moreover, the fact that the participant was being harassed for being too masculine made it an especially sensitive topic of discussion, since being a woman with a masculine gender presentation is often assumed to be a sign of being lesbian. Therefore, she was likely feeling too insecure in her relationship with her mother to risk opening gender and sexual orientation as topics of discussion. Consequently, she had to endure the bullying without familial support and without a space for refuge, as neither home nor school felt completely safe.

For the most part, participants did not identify their family members as a primary resource that helped them deal with the bullying. Only a few participants felt that disclosing the bullying to family members led them to obtain supportive, non-judgmental responses that gave them the reassurance, validation, and encouragement they needed to carry on in the face of incessant bullying. Most of the participants either chose not to share with their families that they were being bullied, or if they did reveal the bullying, the responses they obtained were viewed as unhelpful, confusing, and even hurtful. In particular, a number of the masculine and neutral gendered participants who told their families about the bullying were made to feel that their gender presentation and not being thin enough were the cause of the bullying. These participants were urged to express their gender in a more stereotypically feminine way, as well as to lose weight to better fit traditional notions of feminine beauty in order to avoid further bullying.

Friends. Several participants reported that friends helped them cope with the bullying. Participants discussed having friendships both in and out of their school environments that were important to them, as well as over the internet.

Friends in school. Participants reported that their friends in school were important because of the social support they offered. Specifically, participants' school friends provided social support by serving as a distraction from the negativity of the bullying, helping them feel

more secure in school, and providing companionship. Additionally, since participants often had friends who were also being bullied, these friendships helped them feel less alone in their experiences, gave them a space in which the bullying could be discussed, and allowed them to connect with like-minded people. One participant also felt supported by a friend because she came to her defense when being bullied. Regarding friends serving as a distraction, a neutral gendered bisexual participant who dealt with a great deal of sadness about the bullying, as well as periods of depression, described how her friends helped her get her mind off such issues,

> You are in a social environment, and so, you can only keep yourself locked in the toilet for so long. Eventually you are going to have to come out... cause I did have friends and a lot of people who I liked. And in those moments I forgot [about the bullying], cause then everyone is [socializing] and you just forget about it until your episode.

Also, a masculine gendered heterosexual participant stated,

> I think my friends knew [I was being bullied], like that close group of girls I had… but they also were the target of bullying… we were all kind of isolated and felt alienated together so we just tried to keep amongst ourselves.

As this participant explained, her friends in junior high represented a group she could cling to at school to feel more secure in the school context. Moreover, although the participant and her friends were isolated as a group, they found comfort in being able to relate to each other's experiences. A masculine gendered lesbian participant also reported that she appreciated her friends in school as they decreased her isolation, as well as because she was able to discuss the bullying with them,

> My friends knew everything [about the bullying]… either they were experiencing it first hand by seeing it with me or I would talk about it… it was not off limits to talk about things like that… you know we'd just talk about our feelings and our experiences… so I guess my support system was always just my friends and it was good…

A neutral gendered bisexual participant also discussed obtaining support from friends in school. As she stated,

> I always had friends that I could talk to about [the bullying] and like me and my two best friends in high school would always go to breakfast before school and laugh about it. Because… everything just seemed so small town that you really just had to laugh a lot of the time because there was no other way to handle it, there aren't a lot of supports. So I always had a descent network of people and they could hear the same rumors that I was hearing [about me]… I think I just tried to focus on building good relationships with people where I could escape and just feel good.

As this participant explained, spending time with her group of friends who were all aware of the bullying allowed her to de-stress since it gave her a break from thinking about the bullying and provided an opportunity to be around like-minded people who accepted her.

Uniquely, a feminine gendered heterosexual participant discussed how her female friends, some of whom were also being bullied at school, stood up to the boys that targeted her. She specifically highlighted an incident where her friend stood up to a particular boy on her behalf and a physical fight ensued. As she explained,

> During that time one of my really good friends went up to the ring leader of the guys… and she was really good friends with him… and she's like "You need to stop saying things like this." And I was in the bathroom bawling. And she went up to him and slapped him and she's like "You need to stop" and he just slapped her right back. And she turned around and came into the bathroom and started crying and her face was all red and I was like "Ugh, this is so bad. What do we do?"

Regarding what happened after this incident the participant reported,

> I was really proud of her for standing up for me because not a lot of people would of, but then afterwards I did feel really bad, and she ended up getting detention and stuff… After that whole thing happened where my friend tried to stand up for me, [none of my friends] ever really did anything about [the bullying again]… I think just because they knew nothing would get resolved from it, and it wasn't really in their eyes a battle worth fighting. It sucked. It was just hard to know that your friends wanted to stand up for you but they didn't even think it was worth it because nothing would get done, and I guess I kind of lost faith in the [school administrative] system essentially and what it could do.

Although the participant was grateful that her friend stood up for her, the way the situation was handled by the school administration made her and her friends even more hopeless that things could improve. In other words, the fact that the school administration responded to an explicitly

violent situation between a male and female student so flippantly led the participant and her friends to recognize that fighting for bullying to be taken more seriously was a losing battle.

Friends outside of school. Regardless of sexual orientation or gender expression, participants reported that having friends who did not attend their schools helped them cope with the bullying by providing camaraderie, acceptance and support. However, for participants who identified as lesbian or bisexual, having friends outside of school that also identified as sexual minorities or who were at least open to people of diverse sexual orientations was particularly important. Having friends who identified as sexual minorities allowed the participants to connect with others with shared experiences, which was an invaluable source of support.

Among the lesbian and bisexual participants, a masculine gendered lesbian participant reported,

> I had my one group of friends who didn't go to my school… They were all really open and there were a lot of them who were queer in some way or another, and I think that really helped me just in terms of like I never had the eureka moment for knowing [my sexual orientation] it was just kind of always there. And I think having a group of friends like that meant I didn't have to suppress that… Just cause they were all cool with that kind of stuff so I could be okay with it. And I have no idea what I would have done if that hadn't been there… if I had stayed with that one group of friends and they all wound up getting their boyfriends… I probably would have tried to do something to fit in with that… that probably wouldn't have been very healthy for me.

Similarly, a masculine gendered bisexual participant reported,

> I had friends who I would talk about [the bullying] with a great deal. A few who were in a similar position as me, a few who were openly gay. Yah, friends who went to different schools. And that was my support group and I think because I had that and I knew that there were always people who I could be 100% open with and just say, "I'm scared and I don't know what's going on, and I don't know how I'm feeling and this is crazy," that it wasn't so bad… And they would commiserate with me and tell me about the things that would happen to them also so it made a big difference to be able to have that. Most of them were friends from elementary school, a couple were from camp… if I hadn't had that I don't know what I would have done.

A masculine gendered lesbian participant also discussed how making friends in the LGBTQ community outside of her school context helped her cope with the constant feeling of being an outsider among her school peers, as well as made her more confident and comfortable with her sexual orientation. As she reported,

> As a response to my feelings of generally not being accepted [at school] I clung more to the greater gay community… because I didn't feel safe [at school]… I mean in grade 8 I didn't have anyone… and then I started meeting more gay kids outside of my school…who were my age and were going through the same things… or just like similar feelings of oppression… the whole experience of… being around other people who are like me… was definitely an outlet in comparison to just being at school where I didn't feel like I related to anyone…

For these participants, knowing that there were people outside of school who would accept and understand them helped them cope with bullying. Moreover, these friends outside school often identified as LGBTQ or LGBTQ allies. Participants felt that having friends outside school who could relate to being bullied for their gender presentation, bisexual or lesbian sexual orientation, or for their peers' presumption that they were lesbian, and who could understand the experience of questioning their own sexual identity, helped them cope with marginalization at school by validating their experience, providing support, and decreasing their sense of isolation.

Certain heterosexual participants also discussed having friends outside of their school environments. For example, a neutral gendered heterosexual participant discussed how she made friends with other youth in her neighborhood, which helped her feel better about herself while being bullied by girls at school. As she stated, "I had a lot of other positive reaffirmation from the kids who lived in my neighbourhood... It was like 'Oh, those kids, they're super nice to me. I can have a good conversation with them. I'm doing okay.'" Another neutral gendered heterosexual participant reported, "I always had a job since I was 15. So I had work friends and I'd hang out with them a lot and I had a boyfriend who wasn't in school so… that was also

great." A masculine gendered heterosexual participant who was bullied in junior high also discussed how during high school, she was mainly friends with people outside of her school. As she stated,

> So it was an interesting dynamic where I just felt like I couldn't really befriend, even at an older age, anyone who knew me when I was a kid because I had this sense that they were the enemy almost… And I made really good friends... but most of them were outside of [my] high school and so even when I was older I remained pretty cut off from the kids that I grew up with because I thought they'd remember me as being a snotty angry kid... I mean, I'm sure part of it is remembering the abuse from them and it also reminded me of a negative time in my life, so I just kind of removed myself from school and I had a ton of good friends but they all went to the high school across town...

For this participant, having a social life outside of school was viewed as a necessity since it felt unsafe to be friends with the students who had previously been a threat, and who had known her during junior high when she was being bullied and not feeling good about herself. Additionally, she associated her school peers with the time in her life when she was having problems at home. The culmination of these factors led her to develop friendships in contexts other than her school, as this allowed her to socialize in a different, more secure context in which she could relax and be fully open without fearing judgment or bullying.

Overall, having friends outside of school helped these participants cope with the bullying because it assured them that they could still be accepted by peers in other milieu, which was a hugely important reaffirmation of their value and worth. It also allowed them to develop a social life that was in no way associated with the context in which they were bullied or tainted by those experiences, thereby providing a safe place to meaningfully connect with others and an opportunity to redefine their social identities in positive, empowering ways.

Internet friends. In addition to having friends inside and outside their school contexts who helped them cope with the bullying, lesbian and bisexual participants reported that connecting with people on the internet helped them cope with bullying by providing a safe space

to socialize and meet people in the LGBTQ community. For example, a masculine gendered lesbian participant reported,

> I turned to the internet a lot. I'd find forums and I'd meet friends online and there was that divide where it wasn't physical so, it was safer I guess because I didn't know them in person so if something did happen it wasn't as big of a loss… There was one online game and there were just all these various forums within it and it was one that I ended up going to a lot and it had just general conversation about whatever. And I never really talked to any of them about my bullying or what was going on with my friends. It was just a place for me to be away from what was going on and I think talking about [the bullying] would have taken that away.

As the participant explained, the internet provided a forum through which she could make social connections, which felt safer than in doing so in person. Similarly, a neutral gendered bisexual participant also discussed how the internet was a safe space for her. As she reported,

> I really didn't have a safe space at all. So I guess that's why I was drawn to making online… There's just a lot of like sending each other supportive messages and meeting people with common interests which was pretty much impossible in high school.

Uniquely, for a masculine gendered lesbian participant, making friends on the internet allowed her to connect with the LGBTQ community. As she reported,

> I mean [I met friends] on the internet… I spent a lot of time on the internet talking to other people… just like talking about my gay identity and then having that as… a community… like having people…who would have had similar experiences.

As illustrated in these quotes, several of the lesbian and bisexual participants turned to the internet for additional social support while dealing with bullying. Although some participants specifically sought connection to the LGBTQ community on line, others were happy to obtain general support on the internet, which they perceived as more secure than traditional means of socializing where bullying and rejection felt more likely to occur.

Summary

The results shed light on the nature and extent of the gender and sexually-focused bullying that the participants were subjected to at school by their peers, the many contextual

factors that influenced the victimization, and how they were affected by these experiences in secondary school and over time. The following section will offer a more in depth summary of the results, as well as a detailed discussion of its meaning, significance, relationship to existing scholarship, and implications for future research and practice.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The following section will summarize salient points from the results section and address how these findings answer the research questions that were posed.

Research question one: "How do young women construct their lived experiences with gender and sexually-focused bullying as adolescents?"

The results revealed that the participants faced abusive treatment from their peers at school because they failed to conform to expected standards for adolescent females. Specifically, they experienced bullying focused on their appearance, gender presentation, gendered behavior, sexual orientation, as well as dating and sexual activity. By deviating from the expected dominant standards among their peers in even the slightest ways, the participants were viewed as abnormal and, resultantly, were severely bullied and harassed. Moreover, a careful analysis of these norms resulted in the emergence of several discourses.

consistent with the feminist social constructionist (FSC) epistemology applied in this study, discourses within the results were identified in order to challenge dominant meaning systems that influenced the participants' experiences of marginalization in school and more comprehensively address the research questions (Lock & Strong, 2010). An analysis of discourses has not previously been done in studies focusing on gender and sexually-focused bullying among secondary school youth, or girls in particular, and thus, the resultant findings provide a unique perspective on this phenomenon and represents an original contribution to the existing literature.

Through a detailed examination of the results, a number of discourses emerged providing a deeper understanding of the norms that the participants were expected to meet in order to avoid

bullying. These discourses include: (a) Sex/Gender, (b) Masculinity/Femininity, (c) Gender/Sexual Orientation, (d) Sexual Orientation/Sexual Activity, and (e) Heterosexual/Lesbian. Moreover, within some of the principle discourses, additional sub-discourses also became evident, which will be elucidated below.

Sex/Gender. The discourse of Sex/Gender was evident within the results in that the participants who failed to embody traditionally feminine attributes were severely bullied. The participants were evaluated by others based on the belief that girls are feminine by nature whereas boys are innately masculine. Thus, by virtue of being biologically female, the participants were expected to personify femininity. Clearly, in the contexts that the participants lived and went to school, the constructs of sex and gender were linked into one concept. The result of confounding sex and gender was fuel for the violence against those who did not fit into this misconceived notion.

Masculinity/Femininity. The discourse of Masculinity/Femininity was also critical to the participants' bullying experiences. That is, underlying much of the bullying were judgments made by the participants' peers about how masculine or feminine they viewed the participants to be in their looks and behaviors. The discourse of Masculinity/Femininity was used as a framework through which to evaluate the acceptability of participants' identities and behaviors. For example, with regard to appearance, participants whose bodily shape or physical features were viewed as masculine were considered ugly and consequently bullied, while having a traditionally feminine physical appearance was desirable. However, in order to avoid being bullied, participants had to both appear feminine, and meet feminine beauty and virtue ideals. Sub-discourses that emerged in the results provided a more detailed illustration of these beauty ideals, which included: (a) ugly/pretty, (b) fat/thin, (c) athletic/not athletic, and (d) sexually

developed/not sexually developed. So, participants whose physical appearance was neutral or more stereotypically feminine were bullied for not being pretty enough, thin enough, athletic enough, or physically developed enough. Thus, the discourse of *Masculinity/Femininity* not only reveals the standards to which the participants were held for their appearance, but their rigid and unattainable nature.

The participants' behaviors were also evaluated in relation to the discourse of Masculinity/Femininity, including the way they dressed and the activities that interested them. Participants whose interests or style of dress diverged from traditional femininity were viewed as fundamentally weird. Dressing in a neutral or masculine gendered way, enjoying academics, and disinterest in shopping, makeup or other stereotypical adolescent girl activities were interpreted as pathological. Likewise, the participants whose style of dress and behavior aligned with femininity were also sexually objectified, harassed, and at times assumed by peers to be unintelligent. Clearly, displays of masculinity or even an inkling of gender neutrality was viewed as atrocious for girls, while it was also nearly impossible to perform femininity the "right" way.

Gender/Sexual Orientation. As underscored by the discourse of Masculinity/Femininity, participants that displayed masculine or gender neutral traits in their appearance or behaviors were viewed as deviant by their peers and consequently faced hostility and abuse. What's more, masculine and neutral gendered participants were also bullied by their peers because they were assumed to be lesbian, and this was the case regardless of whether they had come out to their peers as bisexual or lesbian, and despite how they actually identified. The discourse of Gender/Sexual Orientation thereby emerged, reflecting the fact that sexual bullying based on gender presentation was commonly reported by the participants. The results revealed

that a linkage was frequently made between neutral or masculine gender presentations and having a lesbian sexual orientation, while femininity was connected with heterosexuality. These associations were taken for granted as truths and used as the basis for harassing the participants.

Sexual Orientation/Sexual Activity. Another discourse that was apparent in the results was Sexual Orientation/Sexual Activity. The Sexual Activity aspect of this discourse reflects the bullying the participants experienced related to their engagement in dating and sexual activity, or the assumptions that their peers made about their dating and sexual behaviors. The Sexual Orientation part of the discourse reflects how the bullying about dating and sexual activity differed based on the participants' sexual orientation or how their sexual orientation was perceived by others. Sub-discourses that became evident under the umbrella of Sexual Orientation/Sexual Activity are: (a) dating too much/not dating enough, (b) too sexual/not sexual enough, and (c) sexually appealing/sexually appalling.

The sub-discourse of dating too much/not dating enough and too sexual/not sexual enough emerged partly in relation to the dating and sexual-related bullying targeted toward participants who identified as heterosexual or who were assumed by peers to be heterosexual. Heterosexual participants who dated frequently were presumed to be sexually active, regardless of whether this presumption was actually true. Such participants were vilified as sluts by their peers who thought they were dating too much and were overly sexual. Concurrently, the heterosexual participants who were uninterested in dating were pressured to do so and were assumed by their peers to be lesbian.

The sub-discourse of dating too much/not dating enough and too sexual/not sexual enough also relates to bullying that was targeted toward participants who were openly lesbian or bisexual and dating during secondary school, as well as those who were not out to their peers.

These participants experienced bullying about their sex lives and their girlfriends through rumors and insults where they were either hyper sexualized or described as repulsive. Thus, participants who were openly in same-sex relationship were consistently categorized under the too sexual part of the too sexual/not sexual enough discourse. Additionally, it seems that same-sex dating in any capacity was unacceptable, thereby placing lesbian and bisexual participants in the dating too much part of the dating too much/not dating enough discourse.

Ultimately, participants were bullied for their engagement in dating and sexual activity, or for others' presumptions about their dating and sexual behaviors regardless of their sexual orientation. However, heterosexual girls' involvement in heterosexual dating and sex was viewed as "normal" and was permissible to a certain degree. In contrast, same-sex dating and sex was not only intolerable, but viewed by others as abhorrent. The sub-discourse of appealing/appalling corresponds to the differential attitudes that were shown toward heterosexual as compared to same-sex dating and sexual activity. Clearly, heterosexual dating and sexual activity was viewed as positive and appealing relative to same-sex dating and sexual activity, which was unfailingly perceived as strange and appalling.

Lesbian/Heterosexual. The Lesbian/Heterosexual discourse was evident in the presumptions that were frequently made about the participants' sexual identities. Namely, participants were assumed by their peers to be either lesbian or heterosexual; assumptions which were based on certain attributes the participants were perceived to have. Moreover, the qualities that the participants' peers associated with being lesbian were viewed as negative. Consequently, being perceived as lesbian or openly identifying as lesbian or bisexual was a guaranteed way to become the target of hostility at school, while heterosexuality was viewed as the "normal" way of being. Therefore, the discourse of Lesbian/Heterosexual encompasses the

fact that participants had to maneuver within contexts where being a sexual minority was seen as bad and pathological and was judged against heterosexuality. However, as previously discussed, identifying or passing as heterosexual provided no guarantee of protection from bullying, as there were very rigid strictures that participants had to follow in order be heterosexual in an "acceptable" way. Ultimately, it could be said that the discourse of Lesbian/Heterosexual was used to categorize and brand participants as either social insiders or outsiders, wherein identifying or being labeled by others as lesbian was a social death sentence for all students.

Summary and implications of discourses that emerged. In sum, the results of the discourse analysis demonstrate that regardless of sexual orientation, girls in s**e**condary school face an enormous amount of pressure to be "just right" in the eyes of their peers and very little if any deviation from this ideal is permitted. As a result, girls are forced to exert a great deal of emotional, cognitive, and physical energy fulfilling the expectations imposed on them or avoiding the consequences of failing to do so. However, gaining and maintaining social acceptance is a losing battle, as girls must live up to ruthless, unfeasible standards, as well as detect and decode unspoken rules about how they should behave and appear that are constantly changing. In effect, secondary school is a treacherous journey for girls, as there are landmines that must be dodged at every turn and no pathway is without hazards. For example, navigating secondary school by working hard to fit the required mold means sacrificing crucial adolescent years needed for self-discovery and growth for the possibility (but no promise) of preventing bullying. Alternatively, not conforming to the expected standards for girls in secondary school allows for a greater level of genuineness and a chance to cultivate deeper self-knowledge, but renders one vulnerable to torment and cruelty each morning and afternoon, 5 days a week, for the 9 month duration of a school year. Thus, the discourse analysis exposed the numerous double

bind situations that lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual girls are confronted with in secondary school and the fact that the only way out of these binds was to choose a course of action from a handful of dreadful options, each with devastating costs.

Second and Third Research Questions: "**How do young women perceive the influence of experiencing gender and sexually-focused bullying during their adolescence?" and "What meaning do young women derive from their experiences with gender and sexually-focused bullying as adolescents?"**

To date, research focused on the gender and sexually-focused bullying experiences of young women has been scarce, and thus, the second and third research questions of this study have not yet been fully answered by the existing literature. As indicated in the discourse analysis, the young women were pressured to conform to an extremely rigid set of standards in order to be tolerated by their peers or they were otherwise confined to the fringes of secondary school social life. These oppressive circumstances took a severe toll on the young women's wellbeing, negatively affecting them academically, socially, and emotionally. Moreover, the influence of the gender and sexually-focused bullying reached well beyond the walls of their schools to the other contexts in which they lived their lives, thereby shaping the meaning they derived from their experiences.

Immediate response to bullying occurring in school. Scholars have taken an interest in understanding how youth immediately respond to being bullied in order to identify which responses may help or hinder them. Responses to bullying have been categorized as passive and active, with passive strategies including actions like ignoring, walking away, or avoiding the bullies, and active strategies including behaviors like telling the perpetrator to cease their badgering, being physically aggressive, arguing, or seeking assistance from authority figures

(Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2011). Additionally, research on general bullying has shown that girls use multiple strategies for responding to bullying, and ignoring the bullying was the most commonly employed tactic. Also, the longer the duration of bullying, the more likely youth are to perceive their responses as futile (Craig, Pepler, & Blais, 2007; Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2011).

In line with the extant literature, the results of this study revealed that in responding to the persecution at school in the moments after it occurred, the young women used various strategies such as ignoring, arguing, avoiding the bullies, or some combination of these actions. However, this study supplements the extant research by shedding light on young women's frustration at there being so few response options available to them, as well as their perception that these responses were at best temporarily effective in deterring the bullies and at worst increased unwanted attention. Paralleling past research findings (e.g., Waasdorp, 2011), the fact that the young women found their responses to be minimally useful may be related to the long duration of their victimization. The results of this study also uncovered how extremely difficult it was to immediately respond to the bullies, as it required them to make split-second decisions to protect themselves while experiencing distressing emotions. Still, responding to the bullying in any manner required immense courage. The fact that the young women attempted various response strategies and withstood ongoing cruelty while others rarely came to their defense is a testament to their resilience. Such findings represent a distinct contribution to the literature, as there is currently a dearth of information on how young women respond to gender and sexually-focused bullying after it occurs.

Influence of gender and sexually-focused bullying on school experiences. Research has documented that across sexual orientations, experiencing homophobic bullying is associated with lower feelings of belongingness in school for male and female youth (Poteat et al., 2011)

and being targeted with relational aggression has been associated with a decrease in sense of safety at school among male and female adolescents (Goldstein, Young, & Boyd, 2008). Similarly, the participants in this study suffered through ongoing abuse at school, which resulted in them feeling alienated from their peers. The constant hostility from fellow students sent a clear message, namely, that the young women were outcasts who were unwelcome at school. Thus, they experienced school as a place where they were constantly under scrutiny and they dwelled in fear around their peers. These findings supplement the extant literature by providing detailed descriptions of the alienation and insecurity distinctly experienced by lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual young women in reaction to gender and sexually-focused bullying at school.

Past research has also revealed a relationship between experiencing bullying at school and school absenteeism among adolescents in general, and LGBTQ high school students in particular (Kosciw et al., 2008; Nishina et al., 2005). Correspondingly, in the current study, the young women reported that as a result of the gender and sexually-focused bullying, they dreaded going to school and avoided attending if possible, and this was the case regardless of their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender presentation.

Also with regard to bullying and school engagement, Duncan (2003) is one of the few scholars that has focused specifically on the experiences of girls who transferred secondary schools as a result of bullying. Duncan's 2003 study conducted in the United Kingdom revealed that a number of girls transferred schools due to being bullied by popular female students in their grade, and that the bullying they endured was often gender and sexually-focused. Likewise, in this study, a number of the young women considered transferring schools as a result of the victimization, though only one actually did. The culmination of Duncan's findings and the results of the current study suggest a need for parents and school staff to recognize that female

transfer students in secondary schools may be in response to their history of gender and sexually-focused bullying and need support.

The effect of bullying victimization on the academic performance of adolescents is a topic that has been well researched and the outcomes have typically been bleak (e.g., Nishina et al., 2005) Investigations into the effects of homophobic bullying on the academic performance of LGBTQ youth have yielded similarly disconcerting results (Dupper & Meyer-Adams, 2002; Rivers, 2004). However, a different picture arose from the findings of this study, namely, some of the young women improved academically, while others showed a decline in their grades as a result of the gender and sexually-focused bullying. The young women whose school performance improved were predominantly heterosexual, though a couple of participants who identified as bisexual also discussed having a greater focus on academics. These young women revealed that they had immersed themselves in their studies as a distraction that helped them cope with the bullying and as a means of obtaining university scholarships, which they viewed as vehicle to escape their home towns. Concurrently, several other participants started doing poorer academically, and this was the case for lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual young women alike. Accordingly, further examination into what leads some young women to focus on academics as a means of coping with gender and sexually-focused bullying and others to employ different strategies is warranted.

Influence of gender and sexually-focused bullying on relational style. Studies examining how experiencing gender and sexually-focused bullying affects the way that youth relate to their school peers has not been conducted, nor have the long term effects of this form of bullying on individuals' relational styles been elucidated. Although research on relational aggression has shown a link between being targeted with homophobic epithets and social

withdrawal in middle school girls (sexual orientation not assessed) (Poteat & Espelage, 2007), little else is known about how gender and sexually-focused victimization influences girls' interpersonal patterns.

In line with the findings of Poteat and Espelage (2007), the results of this study revealed that being continuously targeted with gender and sexually-focused bullying resulted in the young women becoming increasingly withdrawn around their fellow students. However, this study also adds to the literature by identifying greater social inhibition as a long term effect of this form of bullying on females. That is, some of the participants felt that they remained socially reserved after secondary school and were hesitant to establish close relationships as adults out of fear of being mistreated once again. This social inhibition, made it difficult for the young women to form emotionally connected friendships as adults. Since research on gender and sexually-focused bullying has barely begun to examine the victimization experiences of girls whatsoever, this study's findings on the influence of such harassment on how girls relate to others over the short and long-term offers new insights that have never before been discussed.

Authenticity. In the context of adolescent girls' relationships, authenticity has been defined as "the congruence between what a girl thinks and feels and what she says and does in relational contexts" (Impett, Sorsoli, Schooler, Henson, & Tolman, 2008, p. 722) or more generally, "The ability to be open and honest in meaningful relationships" (Theran, 2011, p.423). As shown in these definitions, the notion of authenticity relates to one's sense of self in the world and how one interacts and connects with others. Among adolescent girls, greater authenticity in relationships has been shown to predict closer best friend relationships and greater psychological wellbeing (i.e., higher self-esteem and fewer symptoms of depressions) (Theran, 2010). Correspondingly, a negative correlation has been found between symptoms of depression and

authenticity in relationships (Tolman, Impett, Tracy, & Michael, 2006, as cited in Theran, 2010). In sum, one's sense of authenticity positively affects girls' psychological health and quality of relationships. However, scholars have not studied authenticity in conjunction with general bullying or gender and sexually-focused bullying.

The results of this study offer a distinctive understanding of how being targeted with gender and sexually-focused bullying affects the extent to which young women feel and behave authentically in general and in relationships. Specifically, due to being targeted with gender and sexually-focused bullying, the young women ascertained that being fully genuine at school was unwise as it would only give the bullies more material with which to harass them. So, rather than feeling free to use their secondary school years to "try on" different ways of being and discover themselves, their focus was often placed on blending in with their peers. For example, the need to feel safe at school and avoid standing out resulted in some of the participants abandoning certain friendships or same-sex dating relationships that they felt were attracting more victimization. Still, others felt the need to become highly sociable in adulthood to make up for past difficulties with peers and prove that they could be well-liked, despite the fact that such this gregariousness felt inauthentic. Ultimately, the results of this study uniquely highlight how experiencing gender and sexually-focused bullying led some of the young women to feel that they had no other choice but to forego their authentic interests and preferences, and change themselves in order to feel safe or be accepted by peers. In so doing, these young women were impeded from exploring and identifying their preferred relational styles, which continued to impact how they interacted with others as adults.

Competitiveness. Another unique finding of this study was the identification of the increase in competitiveness that occurred in the young women as a result of the bullying, which

has not previously been discussed in the literature. For heterosexual and sexual minority participants alike, the results revealed that outperforming others academically gave them confidence and something they could use to bolster their self-esteem while being torn down by bullying. However, in so doing, these young women were perceived as arrogant by their peers and were further marginalized. Thus, as described in the discourse analysis, the young women were once again in a no-win situation, as even their efforts to strengthen and sustain a positive self-image was demolished and led to further victimization. Furthermore, competitiveness was discussed as a relational style that continued into adulthood and that created tension with friends in university. Thus, this study contributes to the bullying literature by drawing attention to competitiveness as a short and long-term relational outcome of experiencing general bullying or gender and sexually-focused bullying.

Trust in others. Previous research has not shed light on the short or long-term influence of gender and sexually-focused bullying on young women's sense of being able to trust in others. The results of this study demonstrated that experiencing gender and sexually-focused bullying resulted in the young women losing trust in others during secondary school, and for some time after. The young women who discussed losing trust in others were predominantly heterosexual, and they explained that the harassment they underwent at school led them to be wary of trusting others in general, but particularly males. They attributed their distrust in men to hurtful, abusive experiences with men in their families, being bullied by boys at school, or a combination of these factors. Thus, this study underscores the need for researchers to take multiple contextual factors into account when examining the psychosocial consequences of gender and sexually-focused bullying on young women.

Fear of confrontation. The long-term implications of gender and sexually-focused bullying on young women's ability to engage in and cope with conflict in relationships is not a topic that has previously been researched. The results of this study revealed that as a result of being mistreated and rejected by their peers, lesbian, bisexual, as well as heterosexual young women avoided confrontational interactions in school and later as adults out of fear of damaging the positive relationships they had. This fear of confrontation led them to bottle up negative feelings, struggle to voice their opinions, retreat from tense situations, and accept poor treatment.

Psychological effects of bullying. The harmful effects of bullying on the psychological health of youth have been demonstrated in the existing literature. Specifically, depression and anxiety have been documented as negative consequences of experiencing general forms of bullying among male and female adolescents. Furthermore, past research has shown that for LGBTQ youth, being targeted with homophobic bullying in secondary school has been linked to symptoms of depression and anxiety (D'Augelli et al., 2002; Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, & Koenig, 2008; Rivers, 2004). Moreover, a study by Rivers and Cowie (2006) revealed that lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals who were bullied in school showed symptoms of negative affect as adults, including depression, anxiety, and hostility. Thus, LGBTQ individuals may be vulnerable to experiencing the negative psychological effects of bullying into adulthood.

The existing research supports this study's findings regarding the short and long-term negative influence of experiencing gender and sexually focused bullying on the young women's mental health. In the face of persistent condemnation at school, the young women experienced overwhelming sadness and feelings of depression, and some indicated that they struggled with depression after secondary school, as well. Also due to the threat of bullying, they often felt anxious while at school. Anger was another emotion commonly experienced by participants as a

result of the bullying, both toward the bullies and the injustice of the situation in general. Furthermore, participants often felt alone in dealing with the bullying and the subsequent painful emotions, as they perceived that few people would be able to relate to their experiences.

Self-esteem. Past studies have identified decreases in self-esteem as one of the consequences of general bullying on male and female youth (e.g., Graham & Bellmore, 2007). Further, a relationship has been shown between being bullied for one's sexual identity or gender presentation and decreases in self-esteem among LGBTQ youth (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012). Paralleling the findings of the extent research, this study revealed that being inundated with criticisms from their peers made it nearly impossible for the young women to maintain their self-worth. In attempting to make sense of the rejection from peers, many of the young women concluded that they must be inherently deficient in all aspects and some continued to grapple with low self-esteem after secondary school. Although the negative impact of gender and sexually-focused bullying on the self-esteem of the young women is a finding that would be reasonably expected, this study confirmed that such harassment is damaging to young women's sense of self-worth regardless of their sexual orientation or gender presentation, and that these negative effects may be long lasting.

Internalized homophobia. The extant literature has identified that sexual minority youth who are bullied for their gender presentation or their actual or perceived sexual orientation may develop "internalized homophobia" (Mishna et al., 2004). The concept of internalized homophobia addresses the challenge that sexual minority individuals face of embracing their sexual identities without adopting the negative societal attitudes about being lesbian, gay, or bisexual that pervade their daily surroundings (Frost & Meyer, 2009). Although a relationship has been shown between dissatisfaction with one's sexual orientation and mental health issues

such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder in sexual minority adults (e.g., Rivers, 2004), there is limited research on the long term effects of experiencing gender and sexually-focused bullying in secondary school on LGBTQ individuals' comfort with their sexuality.

In line with the extant literature, certain lesbian and bisexual participants in this study indicated that the bullying negatively affected how they viewed their sexual orientations, which impeded them from fully accepting this aspect of their identities in secondary school. Although some of the young women grew more accepting of their sexual orientation in the years after secondary school, others continued to feel discomfort about their sexuality for some time. Thus, this study offers important information specifically about how lesbian and bisexual young women are influenced by gender and sexually-focused bullying, showing that such violence has short, and potentially long-term adverse effects on their views of their sexual orientation, their ability to embrace it, and on their overall wellbeing.

Body image. Research shows that body image and weight concerns become more prevalent as youth reach adolescence (Calzo, Sonneville, Haines, Blood, Field, and Austin, 2012). There is also evidence indicating that frequent exposure to media images of thin body types, and internalization of the thin body type ideal contribute to the development of negative body image and problems with eating among adolescent and adult females (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008; Rodgers, Paxton, & McLean, 2014).

With regard to the relationship between bullying, eating, and body image, research by Hyde and Peteresen (2013) found a link between experiencing upsetting peer sexual harassment and disordered eating symptoms among preadolescent and adolescent youth. The same study also revealed that the female participants tended to worry about their appearance, and greater levels of such worries were related to having more disordered eating symptoms. Thus, girls who

experience sexually-focused victimization seem to be particularly vulnerable to developing poor body image and disordered eating.

In terms of the eating and body image concerns among sexual minority females, scholars have postulated that lesbian women may be "protected" from developing eating disorders due to potentially placing less importance on heteronormative standards of attractiveness (Swain, 2006). However, some research has shown no differences in eating disorder symptomatology and body esteem between lesbian and heterosexual women (Meyer & Feldman, 2007), while other studies have shown higher levels of binging and purging behaviors among sexual minority female youth compared to heterosexual female youth (Austin et al., 2009). Nevertheless, the factors leading to the development of eating disorders in lesbian women have been shown to be distinct from other female populations, and may be related to fears of coming out and worrying about judgment over not meeting heteronormative expectations of femininity (Jones & Malson, 2013).

This study's results showed that a number of heterosexual and bisexual participants became dissatisfied with their bodily shape and size, perceived themselves as unattractive and fat, and developed disordered eating behaviors after beginning to experience gender and sexually-focused bullying. In addition to bullying, some participants also pointed to familial pressure and the dominant expectations of their appearance based on their racial background as contributing to their eating and body image concerns. Undoubtedly, and as supported by past studies, negative perceptions of one's body and the emergence of disordered eating patterns in females develops as a result of a complex set of interweaving developmental, sociocultural, and familial factors (e.g., Calzo et al., 2012; Grabe et al., 2008; Paxton et al., 2014). Still, the participants clearly articulated their belief that the bullying played a significant role in the initiation or exacerbation of their body dissatisfaction and eating problems, with some noting that

their first attempt at losing weight was in effort to stop the victimization at school. Although the young women indicated that the bullying in school decreased after they lost weight, the reduction in bullying led them to feel that peer acceptance was dependent upon them being thin, so their fears of the victimization recurring was only minimally allayed.

It is noteworthy that lesbian participants in this study did not indicate that the gender and sexually-focused bullying negatively affected their body image or eating behaviours. The fact that lesbian participants did not discuss eating or body image problems may be related to their standards of beauty being different than the dominant societal norms for women as has been theorized in the scholarly literature (e.g., Swain, 2006), however, confirming such theories is beyond the scope of this study. Taken together, the extant research and the results of this study lend support to the existence of a relationship between victimization based on gender and sexuality, disordered eating, and increased concerns about body image among young women. However, additional investigations are needed to better clarify how gender and sexually-focused bullying affects the body image and eating behaviors of girls of differing sexual orientations.

Resilience, values, and awareness. Although factors increasing the resilience of victimized youth has been a topic of investigation in the scholarly literature, these studies have not examined how young women perceive the development of their own resilience in relation to having experienced gender and sexually-focused bullying. This study uniquely revealed that experiencing gender and sexually-focused bullying in secondary school led the participants to identify areas of resilience within themselves (e.g., greater open mindedness, desire to help others) and heightened their awareness of bullying as a prevalent social problem with harmful consequences for LGBTQ and heterosexual youth alike. Still, the young women would have preferred to have gained these inner assets without being victimized. The aforementioned

findings raise questions about the factors that increase resilience in young women who experience gender and sexually-focused bullying in order to promote their ability to create positive meaning from this hardship and minimize harmful consequences of victimization.

Coping. The extant literature regarding how young women cope with general or gender and sexually-focused bullying is limited. However, a study on young women's experiences of relational aggression revealed that the female victims coped by distracting themselves, as well as engaging in activities such as studying, recreational writing, and sports (Hammel, 2008). Similarly, this study showed that turning to extracurricular activities and hobbies outside of school was a way that the young women coped with the bullying (e.g., sports, journaling, after-school job). These pursuits offered them a distraction from the victimization, a sense of enjoyment and mastery, and chance to connect with people outside of school, all of which bolstered their ability to persevere through the years of bullying in secondary school. However, this study uniquely showed that some of the young women also tried to attract positive attention from school peers by displaying talents such as a good sense of humor or artistic ability. These findings highlight the important role that activities out of school can play for young women in coping with gender and sexually-focused bullying.

Bullying others. Another way that youth may cope with victimization is by bullying others. To this end, a link has been shown between adolescents dealing with major life stressors and engaging in bullying (Konishi & Hymel, 2009). Additionally, it has been demonstrated that adolescent victims of general bullying may also take on the role of perpetrator (referred to as bully/victims), and that bully/victims may experience more severe psychological consequences than those who only have the role of bully or victim alone (Menesini, Modena, & Tani, 2009. Furthermore, familial support has been shown to decrease aggressive behaviors among youth

who are bullying as a reaction to severe life stressors (Konishi & Hymel, 2009). Still, the bully/victim role has not been studied exclusively among young women, nor has adopting this role previously been documented or investigated as a reaction to experiencing gender and sexually-focused bullying specifically.

The use of bullying as a means of coping with being abused at school was discussed by some heterosexual and bisexual participants in this study. These young women indicated that bullying others represented a method of directing attention away from themselves. Although the young women understood the motives behind their own bullying behaviors, they felt regretful about their actions as adults. Therefore, the results of this study reveal that young women may bully others in reaction to the stress being targeted with gender and sexually-focused bullying and so their aggression may actually be indicative of their need for intervention and support.

Cognitive coping strategies. The extant literature has shown that youth cope with bullying through the way they think about and make meaning of their victimization. For example, deLara (2008) who investigated coping strategies used by male and female adolescents to deal with bullying and sexual harassment revealed that understanding the qualities and motivations of the bullies helped them cope with the victimization. Further, research has shown that female students tend to attribute bullying to the perpetrator rather than viewing it as a caused by the victim (Friesen, Holmqvist, & Oscarsson, 2008). Additionally, denial and focusing on plans and goals for the future has been identified as means through which male and female adolescents cope with interpersonal stress with peers, such as being teased, hassled and rejected (deLara, 2008; Sontag & Graber, 2010),

Paralleling the extant research (deLara, 2008; Friesen, Holmqvist, & Oscarsson, 2008), the results of this study revealed that the young women coped with bullying by placing the blame

for the harassment and abuse on the bullies and attempting to understand their motives. That is, they determined that individuals who would behave with such cruelty must be dealing with their own severe insecurities or personal challenges, and that they would probably struggle in life as a result of these issues. Thus, concentrating on the characteristics and motives of the bullies to understand their victimization experiences was an important coping mechanism that allowed the young women to maintain self-worth, build resilience, and avoid falling into complete despair.

In relation to the past research showing that denial is a coping method used by youth to deal with relational stress (e.g., Sontag & Graber, 2010), the results of this study revealed that denial was a coping mechanism that was used by participants of various sexual orientations to deal with gender and sexually-focused bullying during secondary school. However, the results of this study uniquely shed light on the benefits and disadvantages of young women using denial as a coping strategy, demonstrating that it only temporarily buffered the distress from the bullying and that it impeded them from seeking support in secondary school.

In line with past research indicating that focusing on plans for the future has been used as a way of dealing with bullying (deLara, 2008; Sontag & Graber, 2010), some of the bisexual participants in this study indicated that they coped with the bullying by envisioning a happier future away from their secondary school peers that would not involve bullying. This future orientation helped the participants feel more hopeful about their situation in secondary school, but deterred them from identifying additional resources that could have been helpful at that time.

Remaining true to oneself. Although research has revealed for some LGBTQ youth, being in the closet results in greater misery than coming out and dealing with discrimination at school (Nadal et al., 2011), previous studies have not addressed being out about one's sexual orientation as a strategy for dealing with bullying. Thus, this study contributes to the scholarly

literature by showing that some of the sexual minority young women coped with the bullying at school by remaining true to themselves. That is, they did not deny being lesbian or bisexual, nor did they try to change themselves to fit in with peers in other ways. In so doing, these young women had the opportunity to explore and accept their identities while still teenagers, which they believed led them to become more confident and secure as adults. Thus, these results suggest that there may be benefits for sexual minority young women of being open about their sexual orientation despite the fact that this openness may be part of the reason for their victimization.

Disclosing bullying to family members. Support from parents (i.e., support that does not specifically address sexually-focused bullying) has been found to decrease the negative influence of general forms of bullying for heterosexual and sexual minority youth (Bowen, 2011; Murray-Harvey & Slee, 2010), and for heterosexual and sexual minority adolescent girls in particular (Poteat et al., 2011). Additionally, support provided by parents has been found to off-set the negative effects of homophobic bullying on the psychological health of heterosexual youth, but not LGBTQ youth (Poteat et al., 2011). The differential effect of parental support on the mental health of LGBTQ youth who have experienced homophobic bullying may be attributable to them being less likely to share with their parents that the bullying is homophobic in nature, a finding that has been demonstrated in other studies (e.g., Rivers & Cowie, 2006).

LGBTQ youth may not reveal that they are experiencing bullying related to their sexual orientation or gender presentation to their parents out of fear of receiving homophobic reactions or being met with questions about their sexual identity that they are not ready to answer (Grossman, Haney, Edwards, Alessi, Ardon, & Howell, 2009). Although it has been shown that adolescent girls are more likely than boys to seek support from authority figures such as parents for general forms of bullying (Hunter, Boyle, & Warden, 2004), there are many reasons why

adolescent youth may be hesitant to reveal their victimization to authority figures. These reasons include the belief that this disclosure may make the situation worse and or that the adult will not take action (DeLara, 2008). Additionally, a study on how young women cope with relational aggression revealed that reasons for not revealing the bullying to parents include not wanting to worry them and feeling ashamed to admit the peer rejection (Hammel, 2008).

Very little research has examined how parents understand and react to being informed that their child is experiencing bullying. However, a meta-analysis of thirteen qualitative studies that was conducted to examine parent's experiences and perceptions of bullying revealed that they are often not aware that their children are being bullied, they have trouble defining and identifying bullying, they often view bullying as a normal part of growing up, they may take a victim-blaming stance, or they may respond by providing emotional support and trying to work with school staff to address the situation. The same study also showed that many parents feel that schools need to do more to prevent bullying (Harcourt, Jasperse, & Green, 2014). Thus, the extant research demonstrates that parents may display a range of responses to their children being bullied from emotionally supportive to blaming, and also brings to light that they may be totally unaware that their children are being bullied. Still, this study did not specifically address parental responses to gender and sexually-focused bullying of their adolescent children.

The results of this study revealed that some of the participants did not disclose to their parents or other family members that they were being bullied. In line with past research (e.g., deLara, 2008; Hammel, 2008l; Rivers & Cowie, 2006), the young women in this study that did not reveal to their parents that they were being bullied cited a number of reasons for this decision, including: (a) feeling embarrassed to divulge their victimization, (b) not wanting to worry their parents, and (c) feeling that it was not safe to talk about the bullying due to its sexual

orientation focus. However, this study additionally found that the young women did not disclose the victimization due to dissatisfaction with how a previous situation was handled by their parents or because they did not feel that the bullying was troubling enough to warrant telling their parents (e.g., being bullied for the assumption of being lesbian when this is not actually true, which may shift how hurtful the bullying is).

Additionally, this study revealed that the young women who disclosed to parents or other family members that they were being bullied were met with various reactions, which parallels the findings of the extant research (e.g., Harcourt et al., 2014). While some of the young women in this study perceived the responses of their parents and family members as supportive, others identified that the responses they received led them to feel blamed for the bullying. The young women that told their parents about being bullied at school and perceived their parents' responses as supportive identified that their parents had contacted their school administration to urge them to intervene, were emotionally validating and encouraging of them, or showed both responses, which helped them maintain their self-worth and deal with the abuse at school.

Friends. Research has demonstrated that adolescents often turn to friends for help when experiencing bullying (Glover, Gough, Johnson, & Cartwright, 2000). Additionally, it has been shown that quality friendships can increase resiliency in adolescents who endure difficult life events (Kendrick, Jutengren, & Stattin, 2012), and having confidence in one's ability to maintain closeness with a best friend is related to decreases in symptoms of depression among victimized youth (Fitzpatrick & Bussey, 2014). Having friendships in school is also helpful for LGBTQ youth, as it has been demonstrated that that for young lesbian and gay individuals' in secondary school, having school friends who were accepting of their sexual identity helped them cope with bullying by increasing their self-worth, decreasing their isolation, and helping them feel more

content at school (Robinson, 2010). Thus, among its many positive effects (Wentzel et al., 2009), having peer support at school has the potential to buffer the negative effects of bullying for adolescent youth.

Supporting the results of previous research (e.g., Kendrick et al., 2012; Robinson, 2010), the young women in this investigation identified that having friends in school helped them to get through the abuse in secondary school. That is, their friendships provided a distraction from the bullying, decreased their sense of isolation, helped them feel safer in school, gave them the opportunity to enjoy relating to others, as well as a venue where they could openly talk about the bullying. However, the results of this study additionally highlighted the importance of having friends outside of school, a finding not demonstrated in previous research. In particular, for the lesbian and bisexual participants, having friends outside of school who also identified as sexual minorities or who were LGBTQ friendly served as an extremely important source of support. Thus, this study confirms the importance of in-school peer support for young experiencing gender and sexually-focused bullying, emphasizes the beneficial role that out of school friendships can play, and highlights the positive impact that connecting with the LGBTQ community can have for lesbian and bisexual young women who have been victimized.

Research Question Four: "What do young women perceive are the needs of female, adolescent victims of gender and sexually-focused bullying?"

With regard to bullying intervention and prevention, the extant literature has demonstrated that adolescent youth, particularly girls and sexual minority adolescents, feel that it is important for teachers to effectively identify and intervene when bullying is occurring in their classrooms (Crothers, Kolbert, & Barker, 2006; Frisen & Homqvist, 2010; Mishnah et al., 2009). Additional actions that LGBTQ youth believe should be taken to prevent bullying based on

actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender presentation include having designated safe spaces within schools, integrating LGBTQ issues into school curricula, creating and strengthening schools policies related to bullying, and raising awareness among teachers and school staff of the topic of heterosexism and homophobia (Grossman et al., 2009; Mishnah et al., 2009). Sexual minority young women have also expressed that having teachers and staff at school who are out as lesbian or bisexual and could serve as role models or mentors would also be a valuable source of support (Grossman et al., 2009). Beyond the findings just discussed, studies have not offered insights into what young women believe are the types of intervention strategies that would be most helpful to address general and gender and sexually-focused bullying at school and to support those who have been victimized.

The participants in this study suggested a number of actions that their schools could take to address gender and sexually-focused bullying prevent its negative consequences, some of which were in line with the extant literature (e.g., Crothers, et al., 2006; Frisen & Homqvist, 2010; Mishnah et al., 2009). The recommendations offered by the participants in this study included: (a) Placing greater focus on multicultural issues in school curricula in order to increase openness to human differences among youth, (b) Offering formal, confidential support such as counseling for students who have been bullied, (c) Strengthening anti-bullying school policies, (d) Providing students and school staff with a better understanding of bullying in all its forms so that it can be better identified and stopped, (e) having demarcated safe spaces in schools, (f) raising awareness of sexual diversity among youth in schools, (g) making sure that school counselors are sensitive to LGBTQ issues, and (h) having role models at school who are “out” such as teachers or upper level students to whom other students can turn for support.

Strengths and Unique Contributions of the Research

Previous studies have identified that young women are targeted with homophobic bullying, that is, bullying based on their gender presentation, sexual orientation, and how their sexual orientation is perceived by others (e.g., Rivers et al., 2007). However, detailed descriptions of the nature of homophobic bullying toward young women and how young women are distinctly affected by this form of victimization have not been provided. Therefore, this study sought to address the overall absence of research on young women in the extant homophobic bullying literature. In identifying the need for further research on the homophobic bullying experiences of young women, the term gender and sexually-focused bullying was put forward as a more inclusive and descriptive designation for the bullying experiences of interest in this investigation. Ultimately, this study offered new information on the phenomenon of gender and sexually-focused bullying as it is experienced by young women, how this phenomenon manifests, and its influence on young women.

Research on general and homophobic bullying has predominantly been conducted using quantitative methodologies, which has allowed scholars to substantiate the prevalence and harmfulness of bullying. However, this study attempted to go beyond verifying that young women experience gender and sexually focused bullying, to offer in depth, contextualized understandings of their victimization. This study represents a step toward addressing the dearth of knowledge on the gender and sexually-focused bullying of young women in secondary school by employing a qualitative method. While quantitative methods tend to analyze topics by classifying them into pre-determined categories and comparing them, this study showed that young women experienced gender and sexually-focused bullying for the very reason that they failed to align with societally fixed categories. That is, the young women did not fit the “boxes”

of acceptability that their peers and society at large deemed "normal" for them and they were punished as a result. Clearly, the gender and sexually-focused bullying experiences of young women could not be fully captured through quantitative methods that compartmentalize their experiences into presupposed boxes. Thus, this study not only provided unique knowledge on the bullying of young women that is gender and sexually-focused, it underscored the suitability of qualitative methodology to carry out such investigations.

By utilizing a qualitative method, this study offered substantial insights on the gender and sexually-focused victimization of young women while avoiding classifications and dichotomous comparisons that further reinforced their oppression and marginalization. To that end, the extant literature on general and homophobic bullying has been rife with male-female and heterosexual-sexual minority juxtapositions, and a large focus has also been placed on identifying types of bullying, such as verbal, physical, and relational. The contrasting of bullying experiences between groups and the emphasis on types of bullying has not only prevented the phenomenon of young women's gender and sexually-focused victimization to be understood in its own right, it has led to over simplifications and generalizations of the types of bullying that young women experience. For example, relational bullying has often been viewed as a "female" form of bullying while physical bullying has been associated with males (Merrell et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2009). Utilizing qualitative methodology, this investigation allowed the gender and sexually-focused bullying experiences of young women to emerge, and added to the extant literature by showing that the participants experienced multiple forms of violence, including types that have been misguidedly associated almost solely with boys.

Also unique to this study was the feminist social constructionist epistemological approach adopted. This epistemological lens allowed several discourses to emerge, which

illuminated how gender expectations and societal assumptions regarding normative ways of being are integral to the phenomenon of gender and sexually-focused bullying of adolescent females. In other words, the findings of this investigation exposed how bullying is used to control and manipulate the gendered behavior of young women in secondary school and to ensure their continued compliance with conventional gender norms. Additionally, the results of this research demonstrate that the gender and sexually-focused bullying experiences of young women in secondary school cannot be understood by focusing exclusively on masculinity as has been common in scholarship to date, especially the homophobic bullying literature (e.g., Rivers et al., 2007). The results of this study exposed how young women in secondary school are bullied for being too masculine AND too feminine, thereby demonstrating that societal expectations for both masculinity and femininity must be considered in tandem to comprehend this phenomenon. What's more, it was revealed that young women must embody a perfect blend of masculine and feminine traits and remain within an elusive space between the Masculinity/Femininity discourses in order to avoid being bullied. Thus, the results of this study lay the groundwork for further research on gender and sexually-focused violence toward young women that better accounts for the range of societal forces perpetuating and shaping this phenomenon.

Additionally, this study clearly elucidated what it means for young women in secondary school to experiences gender and sexually-focused bullying, revealing a complex picture that went beyond the definitions of homophobic bullying in the extant literature. Young women who experience gender and sexually-focused bullying are targeted for multiple aspects of their identities: gender presentation, how their gender presentation is perceived by others, appearance in relation to traditional beauty ideals for women, gendered behavior (e.g., how they dress, their

interests), sexual orientation, how their sexual orientation is perceived by others, and their engagement in dating and sexual activity or how others perceive their involvement in such behaviors. This study is the first to offer a data-driven, comprehensive understanding of gender and sexually-focused bullying of young women and therefore represents a critical contribution to the literature that will facilitate future investigations of this topic.

Furthermore, the description of gender and sexually-focused bullying unveiled by this study highlights the dangers of applying all-encompassing definitions of homophobic or gender and sexually-focused bullying to diverse groups, which results in superficial understandings of people's bullying experiences. That is, when operating from inadequately formed conceptualizations of gender and sexually-focused bullying of young women, it follows that the effects of such abuse and the interventions needed to support young women will also be unclear. With a stronger idea of how gender and sexually-focused bullying toward young women manifests, parents, teachers, and administrators will be better able to identify it, take preventative actions, and offer effective support to victims. Moreover, it is important that the broader formulation of gender and sexually-focused bullying toward girls is conveyed directly to adolescent females themselves so that they can recognize when they are experiencing bullying and feel deserving of support and empowered to seek it out.

Another important outcome of this study was its demonstration of the importance of the young women's school contexts in relation to how they experienced the gender and sexually-focused bullying. To that end, the young women identified that certain characteristics of their schools inadvertently fostered the development of bullying and hostile educational climates (e.g., minimal diversity of any kind in the student population, prejudice and discrimination toward minority students, and adherence by students and staff to values supporting conservative norms

for gender and sexual orientation). The culmination of these factors led the young women to view their schools as places in which standing out as different in any way came with a risk of being bullied by peers, and even by staff. So, the environments in which young women were expected to spend the majority of the hours of their days are the very places in which they may feel most terrorized. Thus, this study increases the scholarly knowledge base on the factors that contribute to unsafe, toxic school climates in which violence toward young women is more easily cultivated.

Not only did this study fill important gaps in the literature on how gender and sexually-focused bullying manifests toward young women and the contexts in which it occurs, it provided critical information on how young women are affected by this type of violence. This study revealed that young women who experience gender and sexually-focused bullying in secondary school may face negative academic consequences, and are also harmed relationally and psychologically, with effects lasting past high school. Moreover, the results of this study shed light on the distinctive ways in which females of various sexual orientations may be differentially affected in the aftermath of being chronically abused in secondary school. Thus, this type of violence puts them at a significant disadvantage in their adulthood in terms of developing a solid sense of their own identities, building meaningful relationships, achieving emotional security, and growing confident in themselves. In effect, gender and sexually-focused bullying and its consequences on young women represent a violation of their basic human rights and freedoms. However, by documenting how young women are affected by gender and sexually-focused bullying, this study raises awareness of their suffering and offers important information that can inform efforts to protect other young women from this form of violence.

Akin to how young women's voices have been silenced by the lack of research on their experiences of gender and sexually-focused bullying and how they are affected by it, their resilience in the face of such oppression has also remained invisible. Therefore, in elucidating young women's experiences with this form of bullying, it is crucial that their strength and tenacity not be overlooked. Accordingly, the results of this study showed that the young women were not passive recipients of harassment from their peers. Rather, they courageously attempted various response and coping strategies over time in an effort to reduce the badgering, protect themselves, and exert control over their circumstances. Furthermore, despite the harmful nature of the bullying, they managed to grow resilient, build integrity, and draw self-affirming meaning from their experiences. Thus, by addressing young women's resilience and acknowledging their agency, this study contributes to ending the wide spread ignorance on this population's gender and sexually-focused victimization, while also avoiding the reproduction of their marginalization that would come from highlighting only difficulties they incurred.

The young women also demonstrated resilience in how they coped with the persistent brutality at school. They coped using approaches that were largely creative, adaptive, and illustrative of their will to thrive (e.g., turning to a hobby or extracurricular activity as an escape from bullying that allowed them to make friends, foster a talent, and build confidence). Still, the findings of this investigation highlighted how certain strategies for dealing with the abuse were helpful in secondary school, but had long-term disadvantages (e.g., denying the impact of the bullying and having to confront its effects after secondary school). It was also demonstrated that violence begets violence, in that some of the young women bullied others as a means of dealing with their own victimization, though they regretted their actions as they got older. Ultimately, there is no "right" or "wrong" way for young women to cope with gender and sexually-focused

bullying. However, it is entirely wrong, no less a crime, that young women are forced to exert valuable inner resources to cope with bullying when that energy should actually be utilized for discovering and cultivating their strengths. Indeed, violence should not be viewed as phenomenon that young women must cope with, but an infringement of their human rights that must be stopped.

An important element that influenced the meaning the young women derived from experiencing gender and sexually-focused bullying in secondary school was the extent to which they attributed their victimization to internal factors (aspects of themselves) or external factors (contextual issues). Young women who came to believe that the bullying was caused by inherently flawed personal characteristics ended up blaming themselves for the bullying they endured. In other words, some of the young women internalized the hateful messages from the bullies which communicated that they had utterly failed to meet the standards of acceptability for girls, and others only began to re-think these negative views of themselves toward the end of secondary school or after. Young women who attributed their victimization to external factors constructed their understandings of the gender and sexually-focused bullying as being due to contextual elements such as small-mindedness, lack of intelligence, or emotional problems of people around them.

It is important to note that the internal and external attributions of the bullying were not dichotomous, as the young women's perspectives on the bullying shifted over time and across circumstances. Still, this study showed that those who ultimately leaned toward an external attribution of the bullying during and after secondary school were at an advantage with regard to safeguarding overall wellbeing. That is, understanding the bullying in context allowed the young women to feel freer to express themselves genuinely rather than trying to blend in with their

peers, made it easier for them to accept their own identities over time, and helped them remain hopeful that other environments would be more welcoming. Thus, this study highlights the internalized hatred and victim blaming perspective that can develop as a result of gender and sexually-focused bullying, its toxic influence on young women's wellbeing, and the importance of helping young women view their circumstances in context.

The meanings that the young women made of their bullying experiences were also shaped by the various contexts within which they which they lived their lives, and their relationships within those contexts. For instance, the extent to which young women felt unconditionally accepted by their family members substantially influenced how they understood their victimization (blaming themselves or the context), how it affected them, and the ways in which they coped. As another example, sexual minority participants who connected with the broader LGBTQ community in their home towns learned that they were not alone in experiencing gender and sexually-focused bullying, nor in their sexual identities, which positively influenced how they felt within themselves and bolstered their ability to deal with the bullying at school. In sum, an ongoing, mutual, influence existed between the gender and sexually-focused bullying endured by the young women and the various other salient aspects of their lives. Therefore, any thorough examination of this phenomenon requires multiple contexts and relationships to be taken into account.

Implications for Practice

In light of the harmful effects of gender and sexually-focused bullying on young women, action must be taken to support this population, reduce negative outcomes for victims, and prevent this form of violence from being further perpetuated in secondary schools. To that end, counsellors can play a pivotal role in protecting the welfare of young women from the

destructive force of gender and sexually-focused bullying, and the results of this study have important implications for their efforts.

Many young women have and continue to be severely affected by gender and sexually-focused bullying and are in need of intervention. However, any efforts made by counsellors to assist girls that have been victimized by gender and sexually-focused bullying must be supported by institutional and societal changes (Hong & Garbarino, 2012), some of which are already well underway. For example, the urgent need to confront the problem of bullying in schools has been recognized in Canada, as several provinces have enacted anti-bullying legislation. These laws prohibit bullying based on a number of demographic and physical factors. Although the provincial anti-bullying laws are not expressly geared toward addressing the problem of gender and sexually-focused bullying in schools, Manitoba and Ontario require publicly funded schools to allow students to establish gay-straight alliances (LGBT Rights in Canada, 2015).

Clearly, some broad measures are being taken to bring an end to bullying in parts of Canada, and the vulnerability of LGBTQ identified youth has received some recognition, which is a positive societal shift. However, the complexity of the threat facing adolescent girls in schools, goes beyond the problem of homophobia, but this concept poorly understood by the Canadian public and western society at large. That is, very few comprehend the fact that bullying targeted at girls is fueled by the intersection of homophobia, gender phobia, and sexism, which results in girls being at great risk of victimization simply by virtue of being female. Metaphorically speaking, the experience of being a girl in secondary school is like walking a tight rope where there is only one narrow path that is acceptable, and deviating from this path leads to severe social consequences. The plight faced by young women must be better understood in order for legislation and intervention programs to be helpful for this population.

Currently, there is a lack of scholarship identifying "best practices" in counselling with young women that have experienced gender and sexually-focused bullying in their schools. The counselling interventions discussed in the literature that have some relevance to young women's experiences of gender and sexually-focused bullying have mainly been in a group format and have focused on populations such as sexual minority youth (e.g., Craig, 2012) or relational aggressors (e.g., Jones, 2013). The notion of school-based group therapy for young female victims of gender and sexually-focused bullying warrants further exploration since it has been shown to help increase resilience within individuals and is widely used with sexual minority youth (Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006; Thompson, 2005, as cited in Craig, 2012). Challenges to establishing such groups are the fact that young women may not be aware that their experiences constitute gender and sexually-focused bullying, as well as the issue of maintaining their confidentiality in the school environment.

Although scholars have not provided specific recommendations for the provision of individual therapy to adolescent girls who have experienced gender and sexually-focused bullying, suggestions can be made based on the results of this study. Based on the findings of this investigation, counsellors working with secondary school-aged young women must adopt an affirmative stance toward gender and sexual-diversity so that they can offer nurturing and accepting therapeutic relationships and environments that do not reproduce the oppression and discrimination regularly experienced by their clients. In other words, counsellors must refrain from questioning their clients' sexual, gender, or other identities, but rather help them to explore, better understand, and embrace them. These suggestions also align well with the work of Craig and Austin (2015) who investigated empirically supported interventions for sexual and gender minority youth and discusses the importance of using affirmative approach that validates youth's

multiple identities. Expanding on Craig and Austin's (2015) work, this study showed that an affirmative approach is also important for use with young women who identify as heterosexual and feminine gendered, as they can be aggressed for not performing these identities up to standard despite fitting into the dominant model for gender and sexual norms. To maintain an affirmative, helpful stance toward gender and sexual diversity, counselors must continually reflect on their biases, and obtain appropriate clinical supervision (Austin & Craig, 2015).

Additionally, by drawing on feminist and social justice principles, counsellors can help their clients develop more awareness of societal structures around them, and how injustices, such as bullying, develop as a result of these structures (Enns, 1997; Lemberger & Hutchison, 2012). For example, providing information on gender, sex, sexual orientation, and societal stereotypes in counselling can empower young female clients to view the bullying they have experienced as a societal problem rather than being caused by a defect in them, thereby helping them construct more empowering meanings of their bullying experiences (Lemberger & Hutchison, 2012). Also supporting this type of educational intervention are this study's findings on resilience. That is, the participants who came to understand bullying as a problem rooted in the bullies or as a societal sickness, in turn made conscious decisions to act, think, and relate to people in ways that they were proud of and which they viewed as representative of their growth in the face of adversity.

Being targeted with gender and sexually-focused bullying communicates to young women that it is not acceptable to be who they are, nor is it safe to be genuine around others. Consequently, they are at risk of trying to fit in and avoid bullying at the expense of exploring their own identities. In light of these findings, it is important that counsellors working with this population understand the attributes for which their clients are being bullied (e.g., appearance,

actual or presumed sexual orientation, behaviours), attempt to de-stigmatize these attributes, and encourage further exploration of them.

Furthermore, assisting young women in finding peers or role models with shared interests and backgrounds, as well as venues in or out of their schools where their identities and interests can be nurtured and accepted also represent key interventions to assist this population. For example, assisting a female student in finding a space in which she can explore he interest in a stereotypically "masculine" activity, or helping a lesbian or bisexual female student connect with the broader LGBTQ community have the potential to be extremely powerful interventions. In so doing, these young women will have the opportunity to reconnect with their own identities, and gain confidence and assurance in themselves which can act as a buffer against cruelty and disparagement from peers at school.

Identifying supportive people and places will also allow these secondary school-aged women to develop positive relationships with others, potentially preventing the difficulties with trust and establishing closeness with others that many of participants experienced as adults. Counsellors working with female victims of gender and sexually-focused bullying who have finished secondary school may intervene in a similar manner to what was just described. However, in addition to understanding the identities for which they were bullied in secondary school and helping them explore and accept who they are, it is important to examine their relational patterns and how they have changed over time as a result of the bullying. Counsellors can be instrumental in helping young women gain insight into how the gender and sexually-focused bullying has influenced them interpersonally. Furthermore, if there are changes that the young women wish to make in their relational behaviours, counsellors can assist in this process. Still, it is critical to avoid victim blaming or pathologizing, and instead, help clients recognize

their resilience and the ways in which their actions have been self-protective and adaptive in light of the bullying they faced (e.g., not getting to close to others to avoid further rejection).

Additionally, based on the results of this study, counsellors should assess for the presence of body image and eating concerns with their clients who have been victimized, particularly those who identify as heterosexual or bisexual. Interventions addressing the intersection of bullying victimization and difficulties with body image and eating have not yet been conducted. As a suggested starting point, counsellors working with young women who developed poor body image and eating concerns as a result of dealing with gender and sexually-focused bullying should facilitate their clients in identifying how dominant societal norms for sex and gender also create unattainable standards for women's appearance.

Limitations

Although this study has many strengths and contributed an array of unique findings to the scholarly literature, it is not without limitations. One limitation of this study is the fact that the accounts gathered from the participants were of gender and sexually-focused bullying in school were retrospective. Although the young women were not far removed from their secondary school years, it is possible that their accounts do not fully reflect the gender and sexually-focused bullying experiences of young women in secondary school currently. Another shortcoming of this study is that the demographics questionnaire did not ask participants to indicate their gender identity. Thus, the participants' gender presentation was understood based on the detailed information they they provided. A final limitation of this study is the demographics of the participants. The participants were predominantly White, Canadian, of middle or upper middle class backgrounds, most identified as heterosexual or bisexual, only a couple identified as lesbian, and none identified as transgendered. Consequently, the phenomenon of gender and

sexually-focused bullying of young women in secondary school that is documented in this study may not be fully representative of females of other backgrounds or whose identities are dissimilar to the young women who participated in this study.

Future Directions

Although this study represents an important starting point for understanding young women's experiences of gender and sexually-focused bullying, it is a complex phenomenon that deserves further investigation. As this study showed, young women's experiences of gender and sexually-focused bullying are deeply influenced by their particular backgrounds and life contexts. Therefore, it is important that this phenomenon is further examined from the perspective of young women representing diverse identities (e.g., ethnicity, race, physical ability). Obtaining the accounts of diverse young women who are currently in secondary school and being targeted with gender and sexually-focused bullying would be particularly valuable in order to ascertain how they perceive the influence of the bullying while it is ongoing. Additionally, in light of how the participants' interactions with family members and teachers shaped the meaning they made of the gender and sexually-focused bullying in secondary school, investigating how these authority figures make sense of this form of bullying would offer valuable insights into any role they play in perpetuating or reducing this phenomenon. Finally, in order to ensure the quality of any educational or prevention programs designed to address gender and sexually-focused bullying of young women or other groups, they should be rigorously evaluated through research. Moreover, the results of such studies should be disseminated to encourage educational institutions to take action and to do so in responsible, ethical ways.

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Appendix A

Advertisement

McGill

The Bullying Experiences of Adolescent Females

ARE YOU A WOMAN BETWEEN 18 AND 24 YEARS OLD?

WERE YOU BULLIED IN SECONDARY SCHOOL BECAUSE OF YOUR SEXUAL ORIENTATION?

WERE YOU TEASED IN SECONDARY SCHOOL BECAUSE OF THE WAY YOU DRESSED OR BECAUSE PEOPLE SAW YOU AS DIFFERENT?

IF YOU ANSWERED YES TO ONE OR MORE OF THESE QUESTIONS, THEN YOU MAY BE QUALIFIED TO PARTICIPATE IN A STUDY.

Young women between the ages of 18 and 24 who experienced gender or sexually-focused bullying during secondary school are wanted for a doctoral dissertation study conducted by Sasha Lerner under the supervision of Dr. Ada Sinacore.

The goal of this study is to learn more about how secondary school-aged girls experience and are affected by bullying that is gender or sexually-focused

Participants will be offered a $15 gift certificate to Second Cup.

If you are willing to participate in a 90-minute confidential interview, please contact:

Sasha Lerner, M.A., Dept. of Educational and Counselling Psychology, McGill University
e-mail: alexandra.lerner@mail.mcgill.ca
Phone : 514-398-1093

Research Supervisor: Dr. Ada Sinacore, Dept. of Educational and Counselling Psychology, McGill University e-mail: ada.sinacore@mcgill.ca

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

This is to state that I agree to participate in the research project entitled:

The Gender and Sexually-Focused Bullying Experiences of Adolescent Females in Secondary School

Conducted by: Alexandra (Sasha) Lerner, Ph.D. Candidate, Dept. of Educational and Counselling Psychology, McGill University, (514) 398 – 1093

Research Supervisor: Ada Sinacore, Ph.D., Dept. of Educational and Counselling Psychology, McGill University, (514) 398 – 3446

The current study is being conducted by Sasha Lerner for the purpose of completing the doctoral dissertation in Counselling Psychology. This research project is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Ada Sinacore from the department of Educational and Counselling Psychology and has been subject to an evaluation of its adherence to ethical standards by the Research Ethics Board which adheres to the Tri-council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Human Participants.
The goal of this investigation is to examine the gender and sexually-focused bullying experiences of secondary school-aged females. The influence of gender and sexually-focused bullying on adolescent girls will be studied. As a result of the participants' accounts, greater understanding of the unique needs of young, female victims of gender and sexually-focused bullying will be obtained and recommendations will be made concerning ways that helping professionals can best serve this population.

Those willing to participate will be included in the research on a first come, first serve basis. The researcher will set up a meeting with those willing to take part in the study. Additionally, an interview will be arranged for a 90-minute period. The interviews will take place at McGill University. Before beginning the interview, the researcher will review the consent form in detail. Participants will be interviewed by the researcher. Interviews will be carried out in English. The sessions will be audio recorded and the data will later be coded by the researcher and transcribed by a professional transcriber. Transcribers will not have access to any of the identifying information of the participants.

As part of the interview, participants will be asked to share personal information related to their experiences with gender and sexually-focused bullying during secondary school. The information gathered will be used to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how adolescent girls are affected by this form of bullying. In addition, it will be used to develop an understanding of the services needed to support adolescent girls who have experienced bullying

based on their actual or perceived gender expression or sexual orientation. Although the interview itself may be perceived as validating for the participant, there are no expected direct benefits associated with taking part in the study. However, in case of any unforeseen psychological disturbances, the researcher has expertise in psychological interviewing and will have the skills to address any problems that may arise. Further, the researcher can refer the participants to the appropriate mental health professionals, if necessary.

The results from this study will later be disseminated in the researcher's doctoral thesis, as well as professional conferences and in publications. The information gathered in this study may also be used to develop materials to assist adolescent girls who have been victimized by gender and sexually-focused bullying. Upon completion of the study, the data will continue to be stored in locked filing cabinets as it may be utilized in combination with data collected in other studies.

Confidentiality:

- No identifying information will be attached to participant's data (i.e., audio recordings of the interviews and the transcripts). Further, the informed consent and the data will be kept in separate, secure environments (i.e., locked cabinets);
- Only the principle investigator and her supervisor will have a key to access the locked cabinets.
- Audio recordings will be kept until the completion of the study and will then be erased;
- The results that emerge from this study may be disseminated at professional conferences and/or published in scholarly journals. Throughout the process of communicating these results, your confidentiality and anonymity will be safeguarded;
- If quotes are used, all identifying information will be removed.
- You free to withdraw at anytime from the study without any penalty or prejudice;

I have read the above information and I freely consent and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Name: (please print) _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C

Contact Information Form

CONTACT SHEET

DATE: _____

NAME: _____

DATE OF BIRTH: _____

ADDRESS: _____

_____

_____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

PHONE NUMBER(S):

	Number	OK to leave message (Yes/No)	Best time to be reached
(Home)	_____	_____	_____
(Work)	_____	_____	_____
(Cell)	_____	_____	_____

Appendix D

Demographics Form

Please answer all of the following questions by circling the appropriate response/s. Please fill in additional information where necessary.

Background Information:

1) Year of birth: _____

2) Age: _____

3) Relational status:
- a) Married
- b) Single
- c) Partnered
- d) Common Law
- e) Divorced/Separated
- f) Widowed/widower
- g) Other

4) Sexual Orientation:
- a) Heterosexual
- b) Gay
- c) Lesbian
- d) Bisexual
- e) Transgender
- f) Questioning
- g) Other

5) Ethnicity/ies: _____

6) Race:
- a) White
- b) Black
- c) Asian/Pacific Islander
- d) Latina
- e) Other _____

7) Nationality/ies: _____

8) Languages you speak: _____

9) Country of Birth: _____

10) If you were not born in Canada, indicate the year arrived in Canada: _____

11) If you were not born in Canada, indicate your reasons for moving/immigrating to Canada:

_____
_____
_____

12) Primary Religious Affiliation:
- a) Christian
- b) Catholic
- c) Jewish
- d) Muslim
- e) Buddhist
- f) Hindu
- g) Other (specify): _____

Educational Information:

13) Use the table to indicate the secondary schools you attended by writing the name(s) of the schools. For each secondary school you attended, indicate the grades included in each school, the location of your school, the type of environment in which it was located, whether it was a private or a public school, whether it was a same-sex or co-ed school, whether there were resources available for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students and allies, and whether the school had a religious affiliation.

Secondary Schools Attended (Name of school)	**Grade levels Included**	**Location of School (city/town & province/state)**	**Environment (urban/rural/ Suburban)**	**Private/ Public**	**Co-ed/ Same-Sex School**	**Resources Available for LGBTQ Students & Allies (Yes/No)**	**Religious Affiliation of School**

14) Month and year that you completed secondary school: _____

15) Highest educational degree obtained:
a) High School
b) Cegep
c) Bachelor's
d) Master's
e) Doctorate
f) Other

Specialization _____

16) Name and Place of Institution where you received your Highest Degree: _____ _____

Occupational Information:

17) Current occupation: _____

18) Employment status:
a) Full-time (35 or more hours per week)
b) Part-time (less than 35 hours per week)
c) Unemployed
d) Other _____

Family Structure:

19) Do any of your immediate family members identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ)?
a) Yes
b) No

Appendix E

Interview Protocol

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Below are the research questions that will be explored in the semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews utilize an open format allowing for the participant to explore broad topic areas. In this protocol, each research question is followed by the specific overall topic in the question to be explored. These concepts are followed by the initial interview prompt that will be given to the participant to facilitate their exploration of the topic. This initial interview prompt is followed by a list of more detailed prompts related to the topic and its key concepts. At the end of the protocol, a list of process questions is provided. These questions will be used to elicit the participant's overall experience of the dialogue and to help them debrief.

The list of key concepts will be used by the researcher solely as a checklist to ensure that the participant fully explores the topic. If the participant naturally covers these key concepts then the researcher will take the role of "active listener" and will provide no additional prompts following the initial one. If the participant does not address the key topic's concepts, then the researcher will use a more detailed prompt to ensure that these concepts are addressed at some point in the interview. Thus, interview prompts are provided to illustrate what might be utilized to facilitate an exploration of the key concepts if needed. These detailed prompts are not intended to be used as a strict guide for the discussion, but as previously stated a means to ensure that the key concepts are discussed.

Research questions

1. How do young women construct their lived experiences with gender and sexually-focused bullying as adolescents?
2. How do young women perceive the influence of experiencing gender and sexually-focused bullying during their adolescence?
3. What meaning do young women derive from their experiences with gender and sexually-focused bullying as adolescents?
4. What do young women perceive are the needs of female, adolescent victims of gender and sexually-focused bullying?

Introductory Questions:

- Before we begin the interview, do you have any questions or concerns about this process?
- What initially made you want to participate in this study?

Topic A: Contextual Factors

Initial Prompt: Could you describe your secondary school environment?

Detailed Prompts:

- Could you describe your secondary school environment?
    - In terms of size
    - In terms of setting

    - In terms of diversity
        - In the student population
        - Diversity issues included in the curriculum
    - In terms of gender equity
    - In terms of security
    - In terms of values
    - In terms of resources (e.g., advanced placement, special education, etc.)
- Could you describe your school's attitude toward bullying?
- Were you aware of any school-wide anti-bullying policies?
    - If anti-bullying policies existed, were they followed in the school?
    - Was there a system in place in the school through which students could report bullying?
    - Was there a system in place in the school through which bullying was dealt with in your school?
    - If there were no formal policies about bullying, what was generally communicated and/or done about bullying?
- How did you feel in your school environment before the bullying occurred?
- How did you feel in your secondary school environment during and after the bullying occurred?
- Are there any ways in which your school environment influenced your experiences with bullying?

Topic B: Experiences with Bullying

Initial Prompt: Could you describe the bullying you experienced in secondary school?

Detailed Prompts:
- When you think of the bullying you experienced, what words, images come to mind?
- Could you describe some particular incidences of bullying you experienced?
- What is your most vivid memory of bullying?
- For what aspects of your identity were you targeted with bullying?
- What did the bullying involve?
- How were you bullied?
    - Physically
    - Verbally
    - Relationally (e.g., friends ignoring you or spreading rumors about you)
    - By use of electronic means
- Where did the bullying occur?
- How long did it go on for or how many times did it occur?
- Were their witnesses when you were bullied?
    - If so, how did they react to the bullying?
- Could you describe the perpetrators? (e.g., males, females, same-age classmates, older students, teachers)

Topic C: Responses to Bullying

Initial Prompt: Could you describe the ways in which you responded to the bullying?

Detailed Prompts:
- How did you respond to the bullies?
- Who knew that you had been bullied?
    - Administrators, teachers, friends, parents, others?
        - How did they know?
        - What was their reaction?
- Did you tell others about the bullying?
    - Administrators, teachers, friends, parents, others?
        - If so, who?
        - What made you choose to tell those people?
        - What was their reaction?
    - If you did not tell others about the bullying, why did you make this decision?

Topic D: Consequences of Experiencing Bullying

Initial Prompt: Could you describe how the bullying that you experienced affected you?

Detailed Prompts:
- Psychologically
- Emotionally
- Socially
- Mentally
- Physically
- Behaviorally
- Academically
- How did bullying affect your identity/self concept?

Topic D: Coping with Bullying:

Initial Prompt: Could you describe how you dealt with the bullying you experienced?

Detailed Prompts:
- What was it like to deal with being bullied?
- What strategies did you use to cope with the bullying?
- How did you feel about your ability to cope with bullying?
- Were there sources of support available to you while you were experiencing bullying?
    - In school, out of school
- Did you turn to anyone for help?
    - Teachers, administrators, parents, siblings, friends, organizations, others?
        - How did they respond?
        - Was their assistance effective?
        - What would you have liked them to do differently?
        - What were the positive and/or negative consequences of asking various people for help?

        - If you did not seek help from others, could you explain why?
- Did you turn to anyone for emotional support?
    - Teachers, administrators, parents, siblings, friends, organizations, others?
        - How did they respond?
        - Was their support helpful?
        - What would you have liked them to do differently?
        - What were the positive and/or negative consequences of turning to various people for emotional support?
        - If you did not seek emotional support from others, could you explain why?

Topic E: Gender and Sexually-Focused Bullying

Initial Prompt: Could you describe how the bullying you experienced is related to gender and sexual orientation?

Detailed Prompts:
- Are there any aspects of your identity that you perceive as being related to the bullying you experienced?
- Could you describe any other factors that you perceive as being related to the bullying you experienced?

Topic F: Making Sense of Bullying:

Initial Prompt: In retrospect, how do you make sense of the bullying you experienced in secondary school?

Detailed Prompts:
- At the time you were being bullied, how did you understand was happening?
- How has your understanding of your bullying experiences changed since you were in secondary school?
- In retrospect, how do you feel about the way you responded to the bullying?
- What, if any, influence do you think that bullying had on your adult self?
- In retrospect, what types of support and assistance did you need in secondary school to help you cope with the bullying and to prevent negative consequences.
- Beyond your high school experience have you continued to experience bullying? If so, how have these experiences been similar or different to what you experienced in high school?
    - How do you make sense of these more recent bullying experiences in light of the bullying you experienced in secondary school?

Closing Questions:
- What was this process like for you?
- What was helpful about the discussion? What was not?
- What was meaningful about the discussion? What was not?
- Was anything important missing from the discussion?

- Is there anything else about your experiences with bullying that you think it would be important for me to know?

Appendix F

Ethics Application

McGill

Application for Ethics Approval for Human Subject Research

Applicable Research Ethics Board
___REB-I ___REB-II ___REB-III

Project Title: The Gender and Sexually-Focused Bullying Experiences of Adolescent Females in Secondary School

Principal Investigator: Alexandra (Sasha) Lerner **Dept:** Educational and Counselling Psychology

Phone #: (514) 268 - 0282 **Email:** alexandra.lerner@mail.mcgill.ca

Status: Faculty ___ Postdoctoral Fellow ___ Other (specify) _____
Ph.D. Student _X__ Master's Student ___ Undergraduate ___

Type of Research: Faculty Research ___ Thesis _X__
Honours Thesis ___ Independent Study Project ___
Course Assignment (specify course name and #)_____
Other (specify) _____

Faculty Supervisor (if PI is a student): Dr. Ada Sinacore **Email:** ada.sinacore@mcgill.ca

Co- Investigators/Other Researchers (list name/status/affiliation): N/A

List all funding sources for this project and project titles (if different from the above). Indicate the Principal Investigator of the award if not yourself.

Awarded: Doctoral research scholarship. Awarded by Fonds de recherche sur la societe et la culture de Quebec

Pending:

Principal Investigator Statement: I will ensure that this project is conducted in accordance with the policies and procedures governing the ethical conduct of research involving human participants at McGill University. I allow release of my nominative information as required by these policies and procedures.

Principal Investigator Signature: _____ Date: _____

Faculty Supervisor Statement: I have read and approved this project and affirm that it has received the appropriate academic approval. I will ensure that the student investigator is aware of the applicable policies and procedures governing the ethical conduct of human subject research at McGill University and I agree to provide all necessary supervision to the student. I allow release of my nominative information as required by these policies and procedures.

Faculty Supervisor Signature: _____ **Date**: _____

Respond directly on this form below each question. Do not delete the text under the question. Do not omit or reorder any questions. Answer every part of each section. Forms with incomplete sections will be returned.

Describe the proposed project and its objectives, including the research questions to be investigated (one page maximum). What is the expected value or benefits of the research? How do you anticipate disseminating the results (e.g., thesis, presentations, internet, film, publications)?

1. Purpose of the Research

Proposed Project: Bullying is a world-wide adolescent health concern (e.g., Craig et al., 2009). Within Canada, approximately 48% of boys and 61% of girls in Grade 1, and 18% of boys and 10% of girls in Grade 12 are victimized (Craig, Pepler, Jiang, & Connolly, in preparation for the World Health Organization Health and Behavior Survey of School-Aged Children [HBSC]). Bullying tends to be defined by these criteria: (a) repeated behavior, (b) intended to harm, (c) occurs over time, d) physical or psychological imbalance of power, (e) victims cannot easily defend themselves (e.g., Nansel, et al., 2001). Additionally, bullying can take various forms: physical, verbal, relational, or cyber, and in some cases, sexual or gendered harassment (e.g., Meyer, 2009).

The negative effects of bullying have been widely documented. Studies examining male and female youth as a group indicate that those who are bullied are likely to experience anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress, addictive behavior, and suicide ideation (e.g., Graham & Bellmore, 2007; Houbre et al., 2006). Bullying is also related to attentional difficulties, absenteeism from school, and poor academic achievement (e.g., Beale, 2001; Nishina et al., 2005).

Research has documented sex differences in bullying, showing that boys are more likely to physically bully and to be victims of physical bullying when compared to girls (e.g., Dao et al., 2006). While results are mixed as to which sex has more involvement in relational bullying (e.g., Yoon et al., 2004), there is evidence suggesting that girls experience more psychological distress in response to relational bullying than boys (e.g., Cullerton-Sen & Crick, 2005). Additionally, girls are more likely to perceive themselves as vulnerable to bullying (e.g., Dao et al., 2006), and the perception of being at risk of bullying is more strongly related to psychological distress in girls (e.g., Nickerson & Slater, 2009).

Although differences have been found in the bullying behaviours of boys and girls, both sexes use homophobic epithets as a means with which to bully (e.g. Poteat & Espelage, 2007). Such findings are in line with research demonstrating that as children develop, their bullying behaviours become increasingly gender and sexually-focused (Pepler et al., 2006). Subsequently, it has been posited that much of the bullying that takes place in schools focuses on gender and specifically on maintaining stereotypical gender roles (Meyer, 2009). Given the sexualized nature of bullying and the common use of homophobic epithets therein, bullying that is sexual or gender-focused has been of scholarly interest and has been referred to as homophobic bullying (HB).

HB is defined as any form of aggression committed against an individual due to their actual or perceived sexual orientation, or because the individual's behavior is atypical of his or her sex (Rivers, Duncan, & Besag, 2007). Research conducted with lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) youth as a group reveals destructive effects of HB, such as declining academic achievement, increased drug use, anxiety, and suicidality (e.g., GLSEN, 2007). However, few studies distinguish between the HB experiences of LGB youth based on gender and sexual orientation. Research has addressed the homophobic bullying of heterosexual boys (e.g., Swearer et al., 2008), but very little research examines how girls in general, or how lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual girls in particular, are affected by HB. Given the harmful effects of HB, and the serious, responses that girls have shown to other forms of bullying, there is a need to better understand the consequences of bullying toward young females that is gender and sexually-focused.

For the purposes of this study the term gender is being defined based on feminist social constructionist theory which suggests that gender is a verb. That is, gender is an action or a way of presenting oneself with regard to the expression of masculinity and femininity. As such, gender is considered as something separate from biological sex. Social expectations of gender are typically that biological males will have a gender expression that is linked to masculinity. Correspondingly, the term "sexually-focused" in gender and sexually-focused bullying refers to an individual's sexual orientation.

Research Objectives and Questions: The goal of this study is to examine the homophobic bullying (HB) experiences of adolescent females. In order to ensure that the experiences of lesbian and

heterosexual individuals are encompassed in this study, the term "gender and sexually-focused bullying" will be used instead of HB. This research will reveal how adolescent girls experience and are influenced by this form of aggression. The proposed study will address the following questions: (a) how do young women construct their lived experiences with gender and sexually-focused bullying during adolescence?; (b) how do young women perceive the influence of experiencing gender and sexually-focused bullying during their adolescence?; (c) what meaning do young women derive from their experiences with gender - focused bullying during their adolescence?; (d) What do young women perceive are the needs of female, adolescent victims of gender and sexually-focused bullying?

***Value of the Research*:** The proposed study will have several beneficial implications. First, it will increase public awareness and understanding of how adolescent females experience and are affected by gender focused bullying. With increased awareness of how adolescent girls experience bullying that is gender and sexually-focused, there is a greater likelihood that this phenomenon will be recognized when it is occurring in school contexts and that actions will be taken to improve the welfare of the individuals involved. In addition, the information revealed in the proposed study will facilitate therapists, school guidance counselors, and school administrators in the development of interventions, programs, and policies that cater to the unique needs of female, adolescent victims of gender and sexually-focused bullying.

Dissemination of the Results: The results of the proposed research project will be communicated through the primary researcher's doctoral thesis. The results of this study will be further disseminated through presentations given at peer reviewed national conferences (e.g., Canadian Psychological Association Annual Convention) and through refereed journals (e.g., Journal of adolescence; Journal of LGBT Youth; The Qualitative Report, The Educational Researcher). The results can also be presented to guidance counselors and teaching staff in high schools who are working with female, adolescent victims of gender and sexually-focused bullying. These presentations may assist in the development of school-based interventions and programs that will better support and meet the needs of female, adolescent victims of gender and sexually-focused bullying.

2. Recruitment of Participants/Location of Research

Describe the subject population (age, etc.) and how and from where they will be recruited. If applicable, attach a copy of any advertisement, letter, flier, brochure or oral script used to solicit potential subjects (including information sent to third parties). Describe the setting in which the research will take place. Describe any compensation subjects may receive for participating.

The aim of the recruitment process is to obtain 10 participants, as 8 – 15 participants is considered a satisfactory number for qualitative research (Hill et al., 2005). For the purpose of the present study, young women between 18 and 24 years of age, who experienced gender and sexually-focused bullying more than once during secondary school (i.e., between seventh and twelfth grade) will be recruited. Participants will be recruited through on-line forums (e.g., Craig's List), through flyers, and through word of mouth. Interviews will be held in the research supervisor's lab in the Education Building of McGill University. As compensation for participating in this study, participants will be offered a fifteen dollar gift certificate.

3. Other Approvals

When doing research with various distinct groups of participants (e.g. school children, cultural groups, institutionalized people, other countries), organizational/community/governmental permission is sometimes needed. If applicable, how will this be obtained? Include copies of any documentation to be sent.

Not Applicable

4. Methodology/Procedures

Provide a sequential description of the methods and procedures to be followed to obtain data. Describe all methods that will be used (e.g. fieldwork, surveys, interviews, focus groups, standardized testing, video/audio taping). Attach copies of questionnaires or draft interview guides, as appropriate.

For the purposes of this study a hermeneutic phenomenological method will be utilized. Hermeneutic phenomenology will be employed in order to capture the participants' viewpoints, gather contextual data on participants' experiences, and offer rich descriptions of the phenomena under investigation (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Participants will be recruited through advertisements in on-line forums (e.g., Craig's List), through flyers, and through word of mouth. Young women who meet the recruitment criteria and are interested in taking part in the study will be invited to contact the researcher at McGill University by telephone or email. At this point, meeting times for interviews with individual Participants will be scheduled. 90 minutes will be allotted for each interview. Interviews will be held at the participants' convenience in the research supervisor's lab in the Education Building of McGill University. Prior to commencing the interview process, the researcher will explain the goals of the study and any potential risks involved, following which the participants will read and sign the informed consent form. Following the signing of the informed consent form, participants will be asked to complete the demographics questionnaire and the contact information form. Subsequently, the researcher will conduct the interview using the interview protocol that was designed for this study. The interview protocol will undergo a pilot test, whereby the interview will be administered to two participants. Their feedback will be solicited as to what questions need to be changed in order to be better understood, as well as what questions need to be added or omitted. Participants will be interviewed by the researcher. Interviews will be carried out in English. The sessions will be audio recorded and the data will be coded to protect the anonymity of the participants. Audio recorded interviews will be transcribed by a professional transcriber who will not have access to any of the identifying information of the participants. Audio recordings will be erased after completion of the study.

5. Potential Harms and Risk

a) Describe any known or foreseeable harms, if any, that the participants or others might be subject to during or as a result of the research. Harms may be psychological, physical, emotional, social, legal, economic, or political.

The potential psychological risks of the study are minimal to moderate, as participants have the right to choose the information that they wish to share during the interview, to refuse to answer any questions, and to stop the interview at any point. Discussing past bullying experiences may be potentially emotionally-arousing, causing temporary feelings of discomfort for some participants.

b) In light of the above assessment of potential harms, indicate whether you view the risks as acceptable given the value or benefits of the research.

The risks associated in this study are minimal to moderate, but they are acceptable given that this study could provide valuable information about how adolescent females experience gender and sexually-focused bullying and will inform psychologists and schools about how adolescent, female victims of gender and sexually-focused bullying can best be served.

c) Outline the steps that may be taken to reduce or eliminate these risks

Potential participants might have experienced different types and severities of bullying. In order to insure participants appropriateness for the study the researcher will conduct a screening interview to determine: a) that the participant has experienced some form bullying that was based

on their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender expression, b) that the bullying occurred in the past; and c) that they understand the nature of the interview and feel emotionally strong enough to participate

The screening process is as follows:

First, the researcher will provide the participant with a definition of gender and sexually-focused bullying. Then the researcher will ask the following questions

a) When I am talking about gender and sexually-focused bullying do you understand what that means?
b) Have you ever had an experience of bullying based on your actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender expression? How much time has passed since this incident (s)?
c) Given the nature of this topic, do you feel emotionally strong enough to participate in a 90 minute interview.

In the case that unforeseen psychological disturbances occur with a research participant, the researcher has expertise in psychological interviewing and will have the skills to address any problems that may arise. Further, they can refer the participants to the appropriate mental health professionals, if necessary. Upon completion of the data analysis, participants will be given a summary of the results to review for accuracy before distribution of the findings.

d) If deception is used, justify the use of the deception and indicate how participants will be debriefed or justify why they will not be debriefed.

Deception will not be used in this study.

6. Privacy and Confidentiality

Describe the degree to which the anonymity of participants and the confidentiality of data will be assured and the specific methods to be used for this, both during the research and in the release of findings. Describe the use of data coding systems and how and where data will be stored. Describe any potential use of the data by others. Who will have access to identifiable data? What will happen to the identifiable data after the study is finished? Indicate if there are any conditions under which privacy or confidentiality cannot be guaranteed (e.g. focus groups), or, if confidentiality is not an issue in this research, explain why.

All data collected from this research project, including the audio recorded interviews, the transcribed hard copies of the interviews, and the computer files of the transcriptions will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the research's private office. Other materials such as the consent, demographics, and contact information forms will be kept in a separate locked cabinet in the researcher's office. To protect the participants' anonymity, the demographics information forms and the transcribed interviews will contain no identifying information; instead they will be coded with numbers. The hired professional transcriber will not have access to any of the identifying information of the participants. All of the data will be stowed in locked filing cabinets. Once the study is complete, the audio recorded interviews will be erased. Additionally, participant's anonymity will be further protected in that if quotes are used, all identifying information will be removed.

7. Informed Consent Process

Describe the oral and/or written procedures that will be followed to obtain informed consent from the participants. Attach all consent documents, including information sheets and scripts for oral consents.

After potential participants are identified they will meet with the researcher who will explain the purposes of the study and the potential risks involved. If the participant agrees to be in the study, he or she will complete an informed consent form. Participants will be able to withdraw from the study at any time.

8. Other Concerns

a) Indicate if participants are a captive population (e.g. prisoners, residents in a center) or are in any kind of conflict of interest relationship with the researcher such as being students, clients, patients or family members. If so, explain how you will ensure that participants do not feel pressure to participate or perceive that they may be penalized for choosing not to participate.

Not Applicable

b) Comment on any other potential ethical concerns that may arise during the course of the research.

Not Applicable