A CLOSER LOOK IN UNUSUAL TIMES

# A Closer Look in Unusual Times:

## Criminological Perspectives from Crim 862

**June 2020**

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# Preface

First of all, welcome to this book that has been produced by the Criminology 862 class of Spring/2020.

Our title for this book – *A Closer Look in Unusual Times: Criminological Perspectives from Crim 862* – encapsulates well both what you will find here and the social and cultural context in which it was produced.

The "Closer Look" is basically what qualitative research is supposed to do – focus in on particular cases and examples of social phenomena to try and discern the social dynamics that make some niche in the world tick, and uncover the social meaning that actors in those realms attach to what they believe and do.

The "Unusual Times" comes in part from the fact that a third or more of our semester together was wiped out by the historic COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, which meant that it was at exactly the time when students were in the process of gathering the last of their data and beginning to draw all the methodological strands of their work together that the world changed so dramatically and life became dominated by working at home and what seems an endless series of Zoom chats. One impact of the virus was that we were unable to do what has become a tradition in Crim 862 – hosting an end-of-semester symposium of presentations. A fortunate side effect is that it encouraged us to consider other ways of celebrating a productive semester completed under trying circumstances, and hence this book that will allow everyone in the cohort to have a better look at what their colleagues have been up to.

A more unfortunate side effect involved who we were able to include in this book, and we regret that, through no fault of their own, not everyone could participate in this effort. The end of in-class meetings and everyone working at home played out in different ways in different households where responsibilities for children, immuno-deficient family members and other life circumstances played havoc with time and left some class members unable to complete their work by the time we were going "to press," or producing work that was less well developed than they would have hoped. We wish them well and hope they, too, enjoy reading what their colleagues were able to bring to fruition.

But the "unusual times" in our title also refers more broadly to the unusual times in which the corona virus is playing out. Our neighbour to the south has become so incredibly and dysfunctionally polarized that the virus and governmental response to it has become part of the broader cultural wars. Institutions and concepts many of us grew up taking for granted as part of a progression to a better world – concern for human rights, the rule of law, equality and social justice, and a rational social order guided by science and evidence – are under threat. Taken together we see the juxtaposition of a world-wide pandemic that reminds we are all connected and interdependent on this tiny little planet while other forces are simultaneously tearing us apart and building walls – both conceptual and literal – to protect a social order that is based on all the negatives that capture our interest in criminology – xenophobia, homophobia, misogyny, racism, intolerance, injustice.

Indeed, it is perhaps very criminological of us to be spending more time trying to understand the negative things that are happening around us. But from what I have come to know of this year's 862ers, it is ground in the belief that it is only by understanding what gives rise to these negatives that we can generate reasonable law and social policies to keep us from descending further into and perhaps even bringing us back from those negative places.

So while **Steff King** laments the extent to which Indigenous artifacts have been stolen from the people and peoples who are their rightful owners and stored in museums along with the body parts of their ancestors, Steff's focus is on the positive changes that are occurring in this realm and on the policy and legal shifts that see more and more of these artifacts being repatriated and contributing to a broader commitment to finding a more just relationship between Indigenous and settler peoples.

**Ryan Sandrin**, in turn, looks at "Canada's game" – hockey – and focuses on the experience of visible minority players who continue to love and play the game despite every one of them being told at one time or another that they do not belong, not because of a lack of talent, but simply because they are different. His article reminds us of how the game itself loses when we restrict the diversity of talent who can play, and the unjust treatment that the game is only now beginning to address in any substantial way.

**Taline Blakley** next takes us to foster care in her home province of Saskatchewan, where she surveyed and interviewed a sample of foster parents about some of the challenges of foster parenting and how different families cope with these in situations where children may or may not be there for a significant period of time.

The next two articles by **Noelle Warkentin** and **Ashley Peckford** both scrutinize aspects of right wing extremism (RWE) through analyses of the discourse associated with two different forums frequented by those who have taken that path. For Noelle, the question is what brought these people to the movement in the first place, which she assesses by scrutinizing their explanations in a forum where people explain exactly that. Ashley focuses on the language and concepts that are embedded within right wing extremism by looking at how these played out when an RWE group took over an online discussion among members of a video gaming community.

**Yuxuan (Cicilia) Zhang** takes us into the realm of cybercrime with her analysis of a subreddit where victims of cyber bullying share their experiences. Her interest is in understanding both the dynamics of the bullying experience and its impacts on victims in order to prevent that behaviour and mitigate its impacts.

**Raven Lam** and **Andrea Reagan Wong** next take us into the world of sex work, although one of the key questions of Raven's work is whether that is the appropriate label to affix to what her participants – sugar babies – do, which is to trade occasional sexual favours and companionship for being treated with gifts from the basic (e.g., shelter, tuition) to the more luxurious (jewelry, gourmet dining, holidays). Andrea's research looks at more "traditional" sex work that falls more squarely into the realm of prostitution. Her interest is in scrutinizing the ways that digital online culture and social media have impacted the world of prostitution, as well as understanding those changes in the context of the legal changes that came with implementation of the *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act.*

**Becca Wood** and **Kayleigh McDonald** give us the next two articles that focus on issues surrounding sexual harassment. While media attention regarding the Me Too movement has been on celebrities and the powerful, both researchers turn their focus on the experiences of everyday women whose lives are just as important and would provide better evidence of real cultural change. Becca completed interviews with a sample of British young adult women over the general question of whether they had seen any changes in their interactions with men in the wake of the Me Too movement. Kayleigh's project saw her re-visit a job she had prior to grad school, which was working in a restaurant. Her interviews with a sample of women about the varying ways that sexual harassment manifests itself in

that occupation led her to consider harassment not only by customers, but also among workers and by employers, and she finishes by considering some of the policy options that restaurants can consider to manage that phenomenon.

We close with an article by **Kevin Siery** whose interests lay in policing, but whose project focused on the intersection of policing and media portrayals, particularly with respect to gun violence. His analysis of newspaper articles from both 2005 and 2018 – two years that saw spikes in gun violence in Toronto – focused on where blame was laid and the types of solutions that were offered.

These eleven articles covering a wide range of topics reflect the diversity of our students, which I always saw as a source of our department's strength. Different research interests, different theoretical perspectives, different epistemological comfort zones and interests ranging from criminal justice reform to critical analysis of broader social relations make our department a stimulating place to work and learn.

## Acknowledgements

# "Let's Have a Chat":
# The State of Repatriation in the United States and Canada

## Steff King

**Abstract**. Archaeological injustice toward the North American Indigenous population has a long and drawn out history. Reconciliation measures over the past few decades have been proposed for the return and repatriation of stolen cultural belongings and ancestral human remains that occupy many modern museums and institutions. These intentions, however, have proven complicated and vary in success across the northern part of the continent. The present research utilized semi-structured interviews with institutional professionals from both the United States and Canada to compare repatriation practices. Through identifying the primary factors of repatriation on a legislative, institutional, and community building level, results indicate that no matter the location, repatriation is dependent on the wholesome communication between institutions and Indigenous communities. This research provides important insight into the successful aspects of each country's repatriation efforts, alluding to strategies that could improve the reconciliation practices of both.

## Introduction

> *"I started going through and cleaning up one box, one closet, one thing after another; it was just like, 'huh, okay there's humans [remains] everywhere'… literally, just everywhere." (Lena)*

Excavated, looted, and stolen Indigenous cultural belongings and ancestral human remains were once an integral feature of institutional collections. Features of the past were used to teach budding archeologists, highlight displays in museums, protect artifacts from government initiatives to make indigeneity obsolete, and ignore the harm these practices could cause to the people in which these collections mean most. Following a dark history of Indigenous exploitation, North American governments and institutions have begun reconciliation efforts over the past few decades in the form of repatriating these collections to their associated Nation or Tribe.[1] Though the reality of the success of repatriation is varied, despite coming from similar colonial pasts, the United States and Canada have taken on their methods to see this process through. So, which country's efforts have been most successful over the years? What reconciliation and repatriation practices have proven most effective if any do at all? This study aimed to compare the repatriation efforts of the United States and Canada to assess three primary research questions, (1) how legislative requirements, or lack thereof, affect the

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[1] A delineation between the term 'Nation' and 'Tribe' exists between Canada and the U.S.

repatriation process, (2) how institutional responses to repatriation typically are handled, and (3) what primary factors lead to the ultimate success of repatriation?

The answers to these questions rely on knowledgeable participants who have been in the proverbial trenches – handling legislative demands, pushing repatriation cases through institutions, and demanding changes that would help them do these things better. A museum director, collections manager, and repatriation academic were asked to reflect on their experiences and opinions of repatriation in their respective countries. However, before the themes of each of their narratives can be presented, the stage first needs to be set on the historical backdrop that leads to the removal of the collections in question and the definitions and intentions of repatriation as a measure to address that past.

## Background

> *"I think we are so caught up on our side of it - I don't think we realize what it's like to be a tribe and have the thousands of phone calls that they're getting every year of, 'oh we found your grandfather in a garbage bag in the back of the closet.' What kind of toll is that going to take on them?" (Lena)*

> *Take, take, take: A brief history of Indigenous exploitation*

The 16th century saw European settlers arrive on the eastern shores of what would become the United States. To them, in all appearances, the land was unclaimed, untarnished, and ripe for the taking (Koehler, 2007). Though to the people native to the land, they would soon attribute this intrusion of the colonial settler to the beginning of the end; their land taken, their culture stripped, and soon more dead to be put in the ground only to later be exposed again. As settlers migrated through North America, Indigenous people were forced from their land, as in the eyes of the Europeans, without a government they had no property right to own or occupy it. Their belongings and their dead were left behind to be dug up later by the overzealous archaeologist or enthused personal collector.

Time cannot heal wounds when circumstances continue to get worse. The 19th and 20th centuries brought in a new wave of the removal of Indigenous culture as the United States and Canada introduced residential schools aimed at teaching the 'savage' Natives to become more like the 'civilized' euro-white (Woolford, 2015). At this point, more than just Indigenous land was being taken, their beliefs, practices, and sense of self were to be stripped as well. Children were removed from their homes, beaten and abused, and taught the way of the white man, symbolizing what would be for many families, the loss of their cultural roots (MacDonald, 2007). Further, between countries these schools lasted, on average, longer in Canada than in the U.S., consisting of experiences determined to be also more unrelenting in the push for assimilation and having fought reform for as long as possible (Reyhner and Eder, 2017).

But there is irony in all of this since not long following Indigenous genocide and the forced removal of their culture did governmental institutions insist on collecting and displaying the sacred cultural belongings of Indigenous people to encourage the education of their lives

before colonial influence. The narrative shifted from 'abandon your culture' to 'only we can present your culture correctly,' leading into a new wave of exploitation and injustice by the hands of academics and museums, and creating a false a narrative that "true" indigeneity existed only in the past (Grabouski, 2011).

## Reconciliation and the Goal of Repatriation

In efforts to reconcile over the past few decades, both the United States and the Canadian government have attempted to create agreements that uphold Indigenous rights. For both countries, this focusses primarily on asserting that Native people can reclaim and govern their land and cultural property (Bell, 1992). While the historical injustice of the two countries may parallel one another, reconciliation efforts split here, each taking its own approach to how best restore the rights of the cultures they diminished.[2] A general upheaval in the conversation of cultural belongings and ancestral human remains in museums hit the 90s hard for arguments for repatriation in both countries. The practice of removing these items from ancestral land, or even bodily from Indigenous people, filled museums for decades, but in the wake of assertive activism by the hands of Indigenous peoples, and challenges to governmental injustice, these practices were phased out and the attempt to 'right' one wrong created the suggestion for repatriation (Fine-Dare, 2002).

The U.S. adopted a hard approach, suggesting that Usonian[3] institutions would not take repatriation seriously unless mandated by the federal government. Reconciliation efforts saw Congress pass the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) into law, requiring the return of cultural objects and human remains taken from Native land (Yasaitis, 2005). NAGPRA (1990) upholds a strict procedure for when institutional collections uncover Indigenous items or remains. Through the oversight of the National Parks Services, institutions are to immediately begin the repatriation process when items are found or requested from Native tribes, a process that involves systematic documentation, communication between associated museums and tribes, and temporal limits for completion before federal fines and legal proceedings are enforced. Disputes and grievances over the NAGPRA process have not gone unnoticed since its enactment (Carter, 1999), a primary theme in the analyses to follow, but its methods do have benefits in providing deterministic structure to an otherwise challenging topic.

Canadian repatriation and reconciliation efforts operate a bit differently than the U.S., as no formalized federal legislation exists to impose requirements. In the 1990s repatriation was a primary discussion point for much of the anthropological and archaeological institutions in Canada, some insisting that regardless of the presence of law, collections should be returned to their associated Nations (Krmpotich, 2011). However, controversy following Olympic events which displayed Indigenous ceremonial masks without the consultation of the Nation,[4] lead to

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[2] This is not to say that Indigenous injustice had ceased in contemporary times.

[3] The hill the researcher will die on following that United States Americans are not the only Americans. Given all of the other people living in North and South America, Usonian is more appropriate a term than American (but that's a soapbox issue for another time).

[4] Known more appropriately as the Spirit Sings controversy from the Glenbow Museum.

relentless activism from First Nations representatives for the necessity of repatriation. With external pressure from NAGPRA's recent enactment in the U.S., a Task Force Report (1992) was produced by a meeting of the Assembly of First Nations and the Canadian Museums Association following this event. This document, while not federally regulated, recommended a co-operative approach between institutions and Indigenous communities (Nicks, 1992). This plan was widely accepted across the country, though today only institutional, and occasionally provincial, policies exist to govern the process of repatriating associated materials and human remains, leaving it up to the individual institutions and communities to put reconciliation in effect.

Assessments of the repatriation efforts within each country have been produced over the past few years (Bell, 1992, 2010; Nafziger and Dobkins, 1999; Raines, 1992). Mixed reviews about the success and inadequacies of each method seem to align in themes of importance; namely legislative and institutional roles. What many of these articles do not provide, however, is a firsthand account of experiences in repatriation by institutional employees; arguably the people most qualified to assess the outcomes of repatriation measures. What follows is precisely this, accounts of professionals from both the United States and Canada and their unfiltered narratives of their experiences conducting repatriation. Additionally, and more importantly, these individuals also highlight the solutions and next steps that need to be taken to ensure that repatriation supports the goal of reconciliation in their respective countries.

## Methodology

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of three white women. Participants were asked a series of questions about their institutional roles, their exposure to repatriation, any cases they have been involved in over the years, and the climate in which repatriation exists within their respective country. Interviews averaged an hour in length, allowing for casual conversation while also hitting target themes. After each interview was completed and transcribed, coding involved a series of categorizing common themes and then recoding these themes into concise concepts. The data analysis process was aimed at allowing for the natural development of key themes as they were presented through commonalities of thought between each interview (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). Initial themes relative to the repatriation process focused on the realms of legislation, individual and institution responsibilities, and proposed solutions and additional efforts for the future. Though an underlying theme, present in every narrative, was communication, identifying the importance of wholesome conversation between associated parties at every step of the repatriation process.

Ethics approval was granted for the following study contingent on the protection of the interview participants. Subsequently, all participants were given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. All institutional entities not discussed in the context of publicly available literature, Indigenous Nations and Tribes, and specific locations that would jeopardize participant confidentiality were removed entirely.

## Participants

For the comparative purposes of the study, interview participants came from either the United States or Canada; an inclusion criterion being that they had to have experience in repatriation in some form. The two primary participants were contacted personally because of their continued roles in institutions that have a history of repatriation, their acceptance both bordered on grounds of a genuine passion for repatriation and friendly relationships with the researcher[5]. The third participant, a well-initiated Ph.D. candidate, was later asked to be interviewed at the recommendation of one of the previous participants.

Bea has a long history working in Canadian museums and has been through her fair share of repatriations. She recalled addressing the topic of repatriation as an undergraduate - students were often asked to hold debates as representatives of each group involved in repatriations and reach a unanimous agreement, which is a difficult task she remembers fondly. There, her journey had only just begun as she went on to take positions as a collection curator and later museum director at several institutions that would need her to manage their Indigenous collections. Bea is passionate about encouraging the education of repatriation to students and opening the opportunity for communication between institutional and Nation affiliates.

Lena is from the United States and like Bea, has an extensive history in the world of archaeology, anthropology, and museum collections. Her first primary exposure to repatriation came with taking a job as a museum collections manager and learning the processes of NAGPRA when the discovery of Indigenous remains in the museum collections called for repatriation. Lena holds many of the same core beliefs as Bea, in that the best case for repatriation is wholesome communication between the institutions and Indigenous Tribes while holding problematic institutions accountable for their unwillingness to cooperate.

Shelley, a Canadian Ph.D. candidate from the same department, was introduced by Bea. Shelley was introduced to repatriation in her undergraduate days as well, with her supervisor quick to show her a collection eligible for repatriation. She went on in her Master's work to repatriate this collection and continue in her Ph.D. to further delve into the political climate that surrounds repatriation, comparing the well-reviewed practices in the United States to the sparse literature in Canada.

Each of the participants had a wealth of information to share on the topic of repatriation, Bea so much that she came half-way into Shelley's interview and contributed more to the discussion. While the goal was to compare practices between the two countries, participant responses identified many similarities as well. As they are the professionals of their narrative, and experienced in how the process of repatriation works, the subsequent results are formatted to follow the order in which they presented their themes: the role of legislation, the work of the institution, and the support that is needed to improve the process to address reconciliation.

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[5] Ethical limitations of the personal connection to each participant are discussed further in the Limitations section.

## Results

### What's the Purpose of Legislation Anyways?

The role of legislation and policy is notably different in the U.S. and Canada, as indicated in the summary of practices imposed in the 90s above, but each of the interview participants presented more on just whether legislation existed or not in their standard practices. On the topic, three key sub-themes were exposed within each narrative: flexibility is key, external resources are needed, and by and large, NAGPRA was a legislative flop.

### *Flexibility*

Bea and Shelley, the Canadian participants, agreed that the lack of mandated policy to repatriate is ultimately what makes the process work in their country. With the absence of formalized rules and guidelines, institutions across Canada have written and constructed their own manuals for how to conduct repatriation efforts, which is a strength considering that no single case is like another.

> "They are all very flexible. So they do allow for case-by-case basis working through repatriation because each nation that you work with will be very different and that's very foundational to the approach of repatriation here [and] it's recognized very strongly between the different administrators and people working in repatriation." (Shelley)

Bea recalled in her time working in museums over the years that she had written several repatriation policies specific to each institution. What played into them were largely the types of materials they had, the cases she had completed and learned from already, and the collective sharing of policy guides between other institutions. This practice of sharing what works and communicating what had not worked in the past was an effective tool in Bea and Shelley's opinion, to how institutions managed cases without set legislative guidelines over the years.

> "The first museum that wrote their policy made them publicly available to other institutions and it was published in the Canadian Museums Association journal and there were notes and conferences and I would have people emailing, or writing back then, and saying 'can you send me a copy of your policy' and I would send them copies. It was just precedent, and we just copied off of each other. We didn't want to be different, we wanted it to be legal and that it would stand up in court if necessary and by having similarity we just wanted to make sure it was right." (Bea)

On the other side of the border, however, Lena was ultimately agreeing with Bea and Shelley by expressing how legislation like NAGPRA in the U.S. had no flexibility, which often hindered the repatriation process. Her largest critique here echoed many assessments of the act over the past few years (Carter, 1999), i.e., that the mandated and often strenuous steps that NAGPRA requires from the institutions can get in the way of ever completing a case. Lena spoke of one of her current cases that has remained incomplete for several years. Following the procedures of NAGPRA, she did all that she could do within the first month of finding the Indigenous human

remains in questions in the museum collections where she is collection manager. She filed the reports, spoke with the tribes, and even packaged the remains for shipment upon finalizations. However, these remains were still partially under the control of another museum, one that despite promise to file the necessary forms for repatriation has not done so even years later. This small requirement for all associated institutions to file the necessary paperwork before the final disposition of remains is a prime example of the downside to restrictive legislation. Lena is still discouraged because after so long "nothing happened… And logically like all your ducks are in a row. Let's go!"

### *Resources*

> "There are very good things about the approach to repatriation and having that very flexible policy around repatriation but there's also definite drawbacks and a major one is funding." (Shelley)

Shelley brought up a key aspect to the lack of governmental and legislative support for repatriation, without being required to carry out a task there is often very little financial or legal support. In the U.S., National NAGPRA, the governing body run by the National Parks Services, provides various support and resources for both institutions and federally recognized Tribes.[6] On a competitive basis, National NAGPRA provides over $100,000 worth of grant funding annually to support institutions with research, travel, shipment, and ceremonial costs. While this amount may not be much, especially given the large number of repatriations that occur each year, it is evident, through Shelley's assessment of the hardship of lack of funding, that even a small amount is better than none.

> "I have mixed feelings about [having legislation] because it could go well or it could be handled very poorly…It would be nice to have [a] requirement to have those conversations, and a pool of funding that would be available." (Shelley)

### *NAGPRA: "toot or boot?"*

Just because Canada does not operate like the U.S., does not mean they have not heard about NAGPRA, or have no opinions about it…

> "[The Canadian government] also looked at the possibility of national legislation like they have in the U.S….When they looked at NAGPRA in the early 90s it wasn't going so well. And I mean not to say that it's going much better today, but it was very controversial and there was a lot of animosity, especially in the early 90s. So, they decided to work for repatriation on a moral and ethical obligation rather than a legal obligation." (Shelley)

According to the Canadian participants, and the majority of associated literature (Crowther, 2000; Fine-Dare, 2002; Yasaitis, 2005), NAGPRA has a problematic reputation, even so much so as to dissuade another nation from adopting similar measures. Lack of flexibility aside, the U.S.

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[6] Under NAGPRA regulations, only Tribes registered and recognized by the United States government are entitled to the protections of NAGPRA (NAGPRA, 1990). This is a major criticism of the act as it leaves smaller, unrecognized Tribes without the resources or support to reclaim their cultural belongings and ancestor's remains.

act is known for its difficult learning curve: "there's always something weird. There's never a time where NAGPRA is not difficult" (Lena), lack of follow-through in implementation: "More stick than carrot. But as we said, they never implemented the stick so people can feel entitled to ignore it" (Lena), and impossible standards for the smaller institution:

> Researcher: "Cause' like honestly learning NAGPRA for the first time-"
> Lena: "It is rough. It's rough man."
> Researcher: "It feels sort of like a deterrent."
> Lena: "It is. Y'know the fear of doing NAGPRA wrong…"

When it comes to legislation and policy, the consensus among the participants, even between countries, was that generally, a loose policy is better for repatriation to be successful. This allows institutions to set their own processes and tailor to the needs of the Indigenous communities with whom they are working. "When you talk officially you get absolutely nowhere" (Bea). They each advocated for Canada's use of open communication between institutions and Nations, instead of being bogged down by submitting a series of reports and emails through a standardized system like in the U.S. While funding is certainly a bragging point for federal regulations, it loses its shine when there is only enough for the larger institutions to use. Perhaps a mixture of approaches needs to be adopted to better ensure successful repatriation. However, as will become clear in a moment, working through legislative mandates and funding deficits pales in comparison to the issue of an institution gone rogue.

## Night (and Day) at the Museum

The role of an institution, whether it be government, state, or university-run, is an important one. They house the collections in question: the human remains, the funerary objects, the sacred materials. It is the museum that must see that the repatriation is conducted, as it serves as the steward from the time in which the items arrive until they leave ('if' they leave). Attitudes about repatriation, a failure to complete cases, and personal feelings of shame or guilt were identified as sub-themes to this portion of the interview. At the heart of this discussion, participants identified that what makes or breaks a case is ultimately the people who work in the institution and their willingness to appropriately communicate.

### *Uncooperative "Assholes"*

There are a variety of possible answers as to why some individuals are against repatriation: they were taught against it; they have a personal connection to the collections under scrutiny; they do not respond well to being told what to do. The central motivators identified by Lena and Bea are that some institutional and archaeological professionals argue over the ownership of the materials and call repatriation "a plot to empty museums."

Ownership has been a controversial argument even before the resurgence of repatriation efforts in the 90s (Benton, 2017; Crowther, 2000; Thomas, 2001). Archaeological practices not long ago allowed for academics to clear-out excavation sites, Indigenous or otherwise, and keep what they liked for personal or teaching collections. Cultural objects and human remains were treated as personal belongings, "they were passed around the classrooms, dropped on tables,

licked, written on... among other things" (Lena). For some, these findings were to be boasted about; office trophies to be displayed.

> "There's things you can have ownership over and there's things that you can't. Ego y'know. Maybe if we could get rid of everyone's ego, we could finally get something done." (Lena)

The threat, then, to have their 'belongings' taken from them, from their museums, lead to more than creative measures to prevent repatriation from happening. Lena spoke of a case involving a predecessor of hers from around the time NAGPRA had just begun, who was less than enthused about the fight for repatriation.

Her predecessor, we'll call him Tom, was an experienced archaeologist who followed the standard practices of the time that were accepted by many -- looting graves to establish a teaching collection. Over many years his collection grew vast, facilitated by other academic friends with whom he traded skeletal remains for research:

> "[S]o-and-so was studying a scapula or something like that, so everybody would send their scapula to Bob, y'know. Or so-and-so was studying kneecaps, so off they went. So, humans were divided up by part and kind of went between here and there" (Lena).

Tom would later donate this collection to the university museum where Lena eventually worked. As NAGRPA came into question, and Lena had just begun her position at the museum, she came to find his collection… of literal skeletons in the closet.

Tom was the type of individual who did not play by the same rules as Bea, Shelley, and Lena. He was attached to the ways of old and thus did everything in his power to hide the identity of the ancestral remains to avoid repatriation for as long as possible. Lena recalled, when the museum started the repatriation claim for the collection, Tom had built nine coffins filled to the brim with assorted and mix-matched skeletal remains; no documentation, no skeletal association, just loose bone that needed to be repatriated. The ancestral remains were eventually reburied, taken in by a local tribe willing to take in unidentified remains, but Lena, reasonably so, still cannot fathom the extent some people will go to avoid repatriation.

> "What bothers me about it is NAGPRA started when I was an undergraduate and people were like freaked out and they were having full fits because … 'our museums will be empty- blah blah blah.' I mean, the horror stories! Clearly, this is World War III." (Lena)

When comparing this instance to difficulties in Canada, Bea provided similar exasperation as Lena. "Museums are never going to run out of stuff. I mean seriously…" (Bea). This overarching concern for the emptying of museums and the forfeited control of its collections to Indigenous communities is a sentiment that none of the participants could fathom.

> "It's wrong, and if the object would to be given back there's not strengths in 'who was the best steward?' To whom does this collection mean the most? And if they want to burn it, it's their prerogative." (Bea)

Both Bea and Lena provided possible recommendations for individuals who were unwilling to give up their collection for repatriation, namely replacement: "there's Bone Clones, there's 3D-printing, there's technology. Y'know we're not living in the 70s anymore, get it together, move on, evolve" (Lena). Though at the core of their recommendations were 'to be a decent human being and do the job.'

> "Put it into context, if we are that comfortable dismissing a human … then that should tell you how simple it is to ignore a belief system or ignore feelings, emotions, and humanity in a living person ... It just tells you, I guess, how callous we are and how preoccupied with our own interests that we can't see what's out there." (Lena)

### The Job Done by the Decent Person

While each of the participants had difficulty rationalizing the mindset of the individuals who do not comply with repatriation efforts, they could talk for days (and they have), about why repatriation is important. Bea spoke of a case where individuals from another country visited her museum out of the blue one day. By happenstance, an exhibit in the museum had on display pottery, two of which were burial urns from their country. "He was just blown away by this because they don't have anything left. It's like the crown jewels" (Bea). She spoke with the men for a while and eventually offered to give the collection over to them.

> "Who do they mean the most to? Who is the best steward? Seriously, what does it means to the people here in [Canada] to have a pot as opposed to- they've got nothing left right?" (Bea)

The decision to repatriate the collection, to Bea, was a no-brainer. It did not matter if the people were Indigenous or from another country entirely, her sentiment persisted, 'to whom does the material mean most?' "The assumption is that most collections will be returned, and I take great pride in that" (Bea).

Lena expressed similar sentiments. For her, by repatriating primarily human remains over the years, she wanted ancestors back where they had come from and given the funerary rite they had taken from them. Her connection to repatriation was deep, over the years of struggling with uncooperative 'assholes,' as she often refers to them, and deciphering the processes of NAGPRA, her primary concern as a museum worker and as a 'decent' person, is to foster a relationship with the Tribes that sees to the return of their ancestors.

> "We're giving [the tribes] stewardship from day one when they walk in here. They don't know us and we don't know them. We're supposed to protect this other person and there's a lot that goes into providing care for another person besides 'you're sitting in a bag in a dark room.' It's gross. Normally, when it comes to the dead, you wash the dead, you clean the dead, you give them a death rite, and you pass them out of this world-Well, we've interrupted that process. But they need to have the process again and I can't do that." (Lena)

### *The Shame Game*

For the invested, it can be easy to get wrapped up in the emotional aspect of returning cultural belongings and ancestors to their associated Nation or Tribe given the deplorable conditions that put them in the collections in the first place. Each of the participants brought up the idea that some people may be quick to over-apologize for having had the items in the first place, even if they were not the ones to have put them in the museum. This feeling of shame and guilt can often hinder the repatriation process by either turning people away from the idea completely, to avoid such feelings, or adopt confrontational viewpoints at the threat of feeling accused. Bea and Shelley, in their joint interview, noted that these feelings ultimately help no one.

> Bea: "Not feeling guilty is important. I just think it's key. It's hard for Canadians to stop saying 'I'm sorry.'"
> Shelley: "It's very different to have an Institution apologize for its history than have the worker doing the work apologizing all the time."
> Bea: "I'm not saying you don't apologize. I'm saying you don't feel guilty because guilt is disempowering and you can't move the work forward if you're disempowered, anybody, on both sides."

Lena continued this sentiment by supporting an 'acknowledge it, own it, and address it' mentality. Her viewpoint, however, still had notes of internal shame. Her primary worry is the lasting impact the process has had on the Native Tribes. This is a concern she herself struggles with regularly.

> "You don't have to necessarily forgive it. You can acknowledge it without wholesale forgiveness and it's not their responsibility to make me feel better. Or anybody else feel better. And so, I think our desire to endlessly apologize makes them feel like they have to make us feel more comfortable about things when we have no right to be comfortable." (Lena)

This is an important sub-theme of the role of the institution and its workers because, in each of the interviews, the topic of academics expressing and feeling personal shame for having to repatriate a collection was expressed as one of the reasons why repatriation efforts between the two countries appear so different. In Canada, Shelley noted that reconciliation efforts aside from repatriation have helped to foster a better environment for communication between the First Nations and the institutions. While this is not always the case, she noted, many have moved past the stage of 'empty promise' to 'how can we effectively reconcile,' a sentiment not uncommon in the country's efforts in recent years (Corntassel and Holder, 2008). The U.S., however, has yet to reach this point in their conversation with their Indigenous peoples. Bea and Shelley hypothesized that by not effectively communicating that an emotional response to repatriation is not going to help either party, the United States' repatriation efforts are stunted. Lena came to realize this in recent years by building a relationship with a local Native Tribe through unidentified repatriation cases.

"[They] are really cool about it and they're like 'we deal with this all the time and you can't keep apologizing to us about it. We just have to look at where we are now and go forward.' Because the first couple of times [for me]- it was so bad. It was so awkward and embarrassing and I was like 'guys, I am so sorry.' And they were like, 'Stop it. I can't hear you keep apologizing, because you didn't do it. You're trying to make it right and you just can't keep apologizing. We've got to start from here and go forward because we can't look back.'" (Lena)

Bea comes across this problem often with her students when she teaches repatriation in her classes. She knows that to keep healthy communication between institutions and the Nations and to keep people from being scared away from repatriation as a whole, she needs to impose this idea that personal shame has no space in the process at all.

"I say to the students that it's important personally to not feel guilty. You didn't dig up these people, you didn't excavate, you didn't purchase the ceremonial material for a fraction of their value, and you didn't take things from abandoned villages… You personally, did not do that. Similarly, the First Nations people that you're talking to, they weren't alive back then either and all of us have inherited a situation... It doesn't matter who did what, and who's guilty- there's no blame. It's just what is. Therefore, you start with 'how do we proceed from here in a just manner?' 'What is right?'" (Bea)

## Problem-solving

After discussing the processes of repatriation in their respective countries there was a pressing question that had yet to be answered specifically: What would make the repatriation process better? Throughout each interview, it was clear that flexibility in repatriation policy needed to be provided, funding was needed to support the process, people needed to abandon old ideas about ownership, and some people needed to stop apologizing! Yet, these were suggestions made on aspects of repatriation that already existed. From the people in the front lines, in the institutions doing the work, what would make their jobs easier? Their answers: better education and community conversation.

### *Education*

Effective education was a primary suggestion across all participants as a measure to improve repatriation. As educators, Bea and Lena are strong advocates for teaching repatriation in schools. Bea, like in her undergraduate days, has the same repatriation debate in her classes that she had in hers. Over the years, as her students have come and gone, many working in museums themselves, she has seen a drastic institutional attitude change on the subject of repatriation.

"By training all of these archaeology undergrads into preventive conservation and all of the rest, still with the proviso of this repatriation with 'no strings attached,' it's made the museum people much more comfortable because they're talking to one of their own-right? … They've taken the course; they know what to do. It's a 180 over the years. It's really good." (Bea)

And yet, Lena has seen first-hand how educational efforts can also negatively influence an entire generation of young archaeologist's perceptions of repatriation. Even after a four-year education is a university program of professors teaching pro-repatriation and pro-reconciliation, she has witnessed time-and-time again those same undergraduates come out of a field school with a dramatic change in values.

> "They work one season with a grumpy old crew boss and they come back complaining about 'Indians.' One season, all of our work is gone in one season because they got in the way of a crew boss' job to go surveying and not touch an artifact." (Lena)

Education on repatriation is thus helpful, but not the only step. Bea went on to talk about how she connects students to repatriation efforts directly by using the experiential teachings, like that of the field school in Lena's observation, and connecting it to her lessons in the classroom. From a donation of cultural artifacts by a local citizen, Bea agreed to take the collection only if it could (1) be used for teaching her students about archaeological collections management, and (2) after that was complete, she could repatriate the processed collections to a local Nation. This method, Bea noted, worked out perfectly for connecting and educating students about the value of repatriation. The collection of thousands of cultural stone tools was effectively retrieved from a personal collector, processed, cataloged and bagged by students for a course project, and repatriated to a First Nation community to use as cultural teaching kits in their schools. This form of education is ultimately what Bea wants to see happen in more institutions.

> "I really feel like I've had an influence on helping that process grow. In creating a generation of scholars and museum workers who are very open to the idea of repatriation. That it is the norm, it is what is expected, and the answer isn't 'no,' the answer is, 'let's figure out how to do this!'" (Bea)

From a country with hard-set regulations, like the U.S., Bea's hope for education may be a distant dream for Lena. Nonetheless, she still advocates for educational measures that would help with any aspect of repatriation. Speaking on a sister institution that recently had to reopen a NAGPRA case because they discovered ancestral human remains in a box of animal bones while establishing a new teaching collection, Lena strongly suggests that students get a well-rounded curriculum to help with the process when the time comes.

> "If one of us is looking [through] bones and doesn't know what a fractured human bone looks like, you're gonna' think 'oh look deer' and repackage it and not know- never know." (Lena)

Even the smallest lessons, Lena expressed, could save years of repatriation efforts and threats of opening old wounds.

### Community board: 'let's talk about it'

Communication is key, as was made evident at every step of the repatriation process by each of the participants, though, communication is only as good as the people who are part of it. The

contexts of Usonian and Canadian conversations about repatriation are drastically different; the U.S., sparse and emotionally driven, Canada, regular but also varied across location. The consensus by the end of each interview, though, was that people need to talk about repatriation. Institutional affiliates, Indigenous peoples, and even government representatives need to converge in one location and come to terms with how repatriation can best work toward reconciliation.

However, it may be this concept is more realistic in Canadian contexts than in the U.S. Lena's goals aimed low compared to the Canadian conference that created the Task Force Report in 1992, including both representatives of the Assembly of First Nations and the Canadian Museums Association, to discuss how best to address repatriation. She would like to see the development of more burial boards[7] throughout the country. This would promote the gathering of associated people with local repatriations to best facilitate their completion. By making them more accessible and more frequent, Lena hopes this process of open communication would become the norm in the U.S. However, the sticking point that differentiates a U.S. solution from a Canadian solution, is that Lena's idea is focused heavily on giving Indigenous populations a voice in these conversations.

> "What I would love to see, and I also want to see this with pre-contact archaeology, is [the repatriation conversation] shifted out of the hands of white people back in the hands of the Tribes and I want to see the Tribes running NAGPRA on a state level." (Lena)

Having Indigenous perspectives in burial boards for repatriation is not the norm in the United States, especially for small cases. In a recent case, Lena worked with a burial board from another state, one that included people from all aspects of the repatriation conversation. She was amazed at how smoothly the process ran; "I liked the way that they solved the politics of the thing by just working together" (Lena).

North of the border, however, Shelley went into detail about the efforts Canadian institutions have been making in recent years to achieve the outcome of tying in larger conversations between institutions and the Indigenous population with systematic policy.

> "The RBCM[8] just sort of came out this last year with the Indigenous Repatriation Handbook and that's also the first of its kind in the country. There's never been quite that type of a handbook so [institutions are] very much aiming to develop support for Nations who are seeking material objects or ancestral remains [to] be returned to them." (Shelley)

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[7] Burial boards operate in certain areas of the United States (namely California and Montana in the West) which bring together a small number of people, mostly Indigenous with a few institutional figures, to discuss NAGPRA claims in the area according to federal regulations.
[8] Royal British Columbia Museum

These efforts seek to encourage the communication between the affected parties and create consistent implementation that would provide support for institutions or First Nations communities that needed guidance in repatriation.

Repatriation efforts are challenging in both countries, no matter who is willing to talk about it with whom. For the people who are trying to reconcile through repatriation, help, where help is due, could just make the occurrence more frequent and take less of a toll on all parties.

> "[it] speeds things up in a lot y'know and I'm not saying we need to go around regulations because regulations are there for a purpose and they do help in areas of conflict and they do encourage people to do their jobs when their souls won't. But, I think if you supply people like us, who are trying to solve a problem and are meeting roadblocks if you give them this kind of tool we would have been done a long time ago." (Lena)

## Limitations

While the research did cross borders for a comparative sample, there was an integral voice missing from the discussion of repatriation efforts from each country. Like Lena's request for representation in burial boards, this study was missing Indigenous narratives. A complete assessment would include the viewpoints of all affected parties, particularly those that have a history of being ignored. Further research should aim to replicate the study but with an Indigenous sample, asking them to discuss their opinions on how repatriation is addressed in the United States and Canada, to see if there is a potential differentiation in opinion.

An additional concern of the participant sample is present in the relationship the researcher has with two of the participants. While this is not of major ethical concern given the nature of the project topic, it does challenge reflexivity in that, particularly for Lena who taught me about repatriation and with whom I have worked on cases, the information given could have been skewed or influenced based on previous communication and connection (McConnell-Henry et al, 2010).

Participant sample choice was further skewed to a specific kind of person and response. This was a point that came up in the first interview with Bea where she commented that of the people she speaks about they all were of a similar mindset and moral standing. She noted that especially in instances where someone holds a belief against repatriation, "not everybody talks about it. At least here. I'm sure there are dinosaurs out there- of course there are- [but] I don't know any. I [also] don't know anyone who's a member of the Ku Klux Klan but we know they exist." This suggests that a limitation of the study design may exist in that a negative sample was not obtained.

## Conclusion

The road to reconciliation involves more than just successful repatriation. Yet elements of what makes successful repatriation certainly contribute to that goal. Effective communication between the institution, Indigenous populations, and governing bodies is an integral aspect of

figuring out what measures can be taken to make the process more effective and reach more people. Though, as found in the results, people have to want to communicate and they have to acknowledge what is going to be helpful to the process, abandoning deprecating guilt, and working towards a goal that could constructively change how things are and how things used to be. Repatriation may differ in legislation and practice in the United States and Canada, but Lena, Bea, and Shelley have made it clear: It takes good-natured people talking about the problem to come up with effective solutions.

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# Sour Grapes: Exploring the Experiences of Minority Hockey Players in Their Battles Against Racism

## Ryan Sandrin

**Abstract.** Given Canada's designation as a cultural mosaic, one might assume that its national game would mimic similar traits of inclusivity, diversity, and equality. However, several recent incidents involving racism in hockey have received considerable attention, putting a damper on both the sport and the nation so invested in it. As a sport formed primarily out of mono-ethnic Anglicized interests, it is evident that a desire to keep hockey 'White' has persisted to this day (Shephard, 2014). To further the understanding on the phenomenon, semi-structured interviews were conducted with high-level minority hockey players throughout Western Canada. Findings reveal that racism within the game is unfortunately alive and well, and that its transgressions occur in a multitude of different ways. Further, the nature and systemics of the game are often conducive to fostering an environment which breeds such racialized events. I emphasize the need for further Canadian-based research into hockey and racism to more fully understand the complexities of the phenomenon given the sport's vast popularity in the nation, and the deleterious impact of racist behaviour on the game.

## Introduction

*"We arrived in those towns as hockey players expecting to play a square game, stick to stick, end to end, fair and equal. But they only ever saw us as Indians. They only ever saw brown faces where white ones should have been. We were an unwelcome entity in their midst."*

*– Saul Indian Horse (Wagamese, 2012)*

Hockey in Canada has been conceptualized as a cultural truism and a way of life, with a bind so powerful that it has united a vast nation from coast to coast (Cairnie, 2019). Where Canada's classification as a cultural mosaic is said to embrace the ideals of multiculturalism, hockey as a national symbol has similarly been compared for its ability to harbour kinship bonds within ethnic, class and cultural groups (Pryer, 2002). While such perceptions of *come one come all* have remained prevalent in the sport, recent critical events such as Don Cherry's racial poppy tirade and coach Bill Peters' racial slurs at Akim Aliu have cast doubt on both the nation's embrace of the mosaic, and its beloved game's inclusivity to minorities.

The increasing emergence of recent case studies have slowly but surely resurfaced what was believed to be an extinct narrative that hockey culture may have rampant issues of racism

running amok. Although Larry Kwong, Fred Saskamoose and Willie O'Ree[1] were pioneers in breaking respective barriers within the National Hockey League (NHL) over 60 years ago, it is evident that an undercurrent of racism in hockey remains strong (Popplewell, 2020). With an abundance of events but a paucity of detailed academic literature devoted to the topic, the current study sought to expand the understanding of racism in Canadian hockey through interviews of minority hockey players.

## History of Hockey in Canada and its Role as a National Identity

In the early 19th century, various governmental stakeholders involved with the United Canadas,[2] Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick sought to introduce a variety of imported European games as a means of social control and conditioning (Jarvie & Maguire, 1994). Such games were sought for their symbolic value in having newly colonized people partake in British activities as a vehicle for English imperialism and the reproduction of Victorian social order (Robidoux, 2002). While stakeholders were only mildly effective in bringing over sports such as cricket and soccer, a Canadian variation of stick and ball games in ice hockey soon became widely embraced throughout the nation for its unique and violent nature, as well as the frozen landscape that the game was played on, which became symbolic in embodying what life as a Canadian colonist ought to look like (Robidoux, 2002). By emerging at a time when a national identity was truly lacking, hockey served as the necessary bind to unite infant Canada, a nation fresh out of confederation (Robidoux, 2002).

## Racism in Hockey

As vast geographic landscapes and demographics resulted in *Canada* having different meanings to different people, hockey was often seen as the only tie that bound various groups of "hyphenated-Canadians" in a young country struggling to establish its own identity (Wilson, 2005). Unfortunately, for all the alleged binding power promoted by both Canada as a nation and hockey as a sport, minorities have experienced Canada's national identity in a significantly different manner from their White counterparts (Craig, 2009). Minority hockey players have been faced with a barrage of discriminatory and racial actions that are not aberrations or anomalies, but rather, a constant occurrence in a sport where a person of colour has assumed a role traditionally filled by a White person (Szto, 2013; 2016). Provided that the game's origin was formed primarily out of Anglicized Euro-centric values, such interests to keep the game White have undoubtedly persisted to this day (Shephard, 2014).

As Canada's "religion" (Allen as cited in Kidd, 2013), Canadians have been uneasy with the realities of racism in hockey. In fact, hockey has been elevated to such a status, that criticisms of the sport have often resulted in the "evoking of patriotic heresy" (Black, 2011, p. 42). In fact,

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[1] Larry Kwong, an Asian-Canadian, broke the NHL colour barrier on March 13th, 1948, playing just one shift in his only NHL game. Nearly six years later on February 27, 1954, Fred Saskamoose became the first Indigenous player to suit up with the Chicago Blackhawks. Finally on January 18th, 1958, Willie O'Ree became the first Black hockey player to suit up for an NHL team, when he played for the Boston Bruins.
[2] Prior to the Canadian Confederation of July 1st, 1867, the United Province of Canada was a merged colony consisting of Upper and Lower Canada, or what would be modernly recognized as the provinces of Ontario and Quebec.

any heterogeneity of race in the development of the sport has been so neglected that Fosty and Fosty (2008) even went so far as to claim that those in hockey have failed to recognize the contributions of non-Whites to the development of the game, and that the sport's history has been constructed as being "Whiter than a Canadian winter" (p. 221). However, it has been impossible to remain blind to the intricacies and complexities of racism that have interplayed with the sport. Take for example the emergence of these high-profile incidents from the most recent 2019/2020 NHL season alone.

## Recent Incidents

On November 9th, 2019, television personality Don 'Grapes' Cherry was fired from CBC's Hockey Night in Canada for an on-air rant in which he indirectly called out immigrants (*you people* specifically), for refusing to wear poppies in the lead up to Remembrance Day (Pingue, 2019). This last straw succeeded a nearly 40 year history of famously brash statements made by Cherry on his popular "Coach's Corner" segment, which included slander on Indigenous hockey players from the Ojibwa tribe for their lack of work ethic (Ho, 2019); His infamous rants on European players which also included calling Quebecers whiners (Rush, 2013); and his generally disgruntled attitude toward immigrants who did not fit the stereotypical mold of a *good Canadian kid*.

It took only 16 days after Cherry's incident for Nigerian-born professional hockey player Akim Aliu to publicly voice allegations that at-the-time Calgary Flames coach Bill Peters had repeatedly used racial epithets in a minor league locker room over a decade ago, which eventually led to Peters' resignation from the Flames (Wawrow, 2019). Less than a month later, Aliu reported another incident (with photo evidence) that as a member of the East Coast Hockey League's (ECHL) Colorado Eagles in 2011, an equipment manager wore blackface, an afro-style wig, and a jersey with Aliu's number and nickname to a team Halloween party (Wawrow, 2019). Soon into the new year in a separate incident, Edmonton Oilers minor league defenseman Brandon Manning was suspended for 5 games after hurling racial slurs on the ice at Bokondji Imama, a Black hockey player (Clinton, 2020). Finally, Paul Bisonnette, a mixed-ethnicity former NHL player and current host of the popular podcast *Spittin' Chiclets* shed his "metaphorical gloves" with Daniel Carcillo on twitter by accusing the latter of calling him the N-word and wearing a robe with a swastika on it while the two played on the same team from 2005-2007 (Mallory, 2020, para. 1).

## The Current Study

The most recent events are likely just the spark to the wildfire of allegations involving racism that will blaze in the coming years, having become well established that "the ice has not been a welcoming place for people of colour" (Rao, 2019, para. 1). In response, the NHL instituted a code of conduct which includes mandatory annual programs on counseling, consciousness-raising, and diversity training (Campbell, 2019). While the initiative *prima facie* appears a step in the right direction and shows that the NHL is attentive to the issue, the code of conduct needs a full buy-in from all stakeholders to ensure that it does not stumble out of the gates like their *Hockey is for Everyone* campaign, which has just recently gained traction after 20 years of

existence. Furthermore, what is needed above all else is a more detailed examination of players' experiences in regards to racist behaviour, given that knowledge on the nature and extent of the problem is a foundational step to making meaningful changes. As media coverage on these issues seldom gives voice to the players actually impacted by the matter, and there has been an overall paucity of academic research that has examined such issues, the current qualitative study used semi-structured interviews with minority hockey players to compile information about their experiences with racism in the sport.

## Method

### Sample

The current study received ethics approval from the course instructor as a minimal risk project as mandated by Simon Fraser University's (SFU) ethics policy (R 20.01). The study utilized both criterion and snowball sampling methods to recruit high-level Canadian hockey players across Western Canada for semi-structured interviews, with the hope of gathering a diverse sample to explore a broad a range of situations, leagues, and experiences (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). For the purpose of this study, a *high-level hockey player* was defined as playing at a minimum of a Jr. B level, which falls under a hierarchical ranking system established by Hockey Canada. All participants were at least 18 years of age or older as of December 31st, 2019, and were either still playing competitively, or were most recently active as of the beginning of the 2017/2018 hockey season. The criterion that all participants met was of being a member of a visible minority (i.e., non-white in colour). Individuals of mixed ethnicity were included as potential participants as long as they had been identified by others as a visible minority as evidenced by the fact that they had a story to tell.

A roster analysis of all teams in Western Canada was conducted to establish an early candidacy list of potential participants. After secondary vetting, prospective participants were contacted directly to gauge their interest in the study. To add to the potential sample, the management of all junior teams in the region where the study took place were also contacted with a request to forward a participant recruitment email to its players. Unfortunately, I did not receive any replies from the management of teams. While several possibilities exist for this lack of response, one theoretical reason could be that if racism in hockey is systemic, then those in managerial positions of organizations may not be receptive to such chatter among its players. In all, guided by the recommendation of a minimum of six participants for high-level theme development (Guest et al., 2006), the current study involved an ethnically diverse sample of seven participants[3] in their early adulthood who were playing junior, collegiate and professional hockey.

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[3] One of the participants in the study was an American citizen. However, his participation in the study was justified and deemed essential as he: (1) has played in Canada in multiple leagues over his adolescence and adulthood; (2) has spent his last several summers living and training in Canada; and (3) most importantly, contributed to both the diversity of the sample and to the wealth of information that was gathered.

## Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were employed in the current study, which provided a framework of predetermined questions based on the research outline, as well as the flexibility to steer the direction of the interview if unanticipated topics emerged. This flexibility was further beneficial as it created an environment where information and questions flowed freely and bi-directionally, which allowed for building rapport and participant comfort as it showcased my awareness of the subject and the sport (Berg, 2009). Specific themes that were focused on during the interviews included 1) how these incidents occurred; 2) the response to these incidents by all stakeholders; 3) how the systemic facets of the sport may condone racialized behaviour; and 4) policy implications for combatting racism in hockey.

Interviews were scheduled in various locations depending on subject availability. Due to demanding travel schedules with their respective teams, some interviews were conducted through Skype, a popular voice over internet protocol (VOIP) technology. While online interviews have been shown to have some concerns for confidentiality, several ethical measures were taken in these instances. Although the nature of the study did not insinuate such, illegal activities were not discussed over Skype, which mitigated potential concerns involving service encryption and Skype network monitoring (Lo Iacono, Symonds, & Brown, 2016). Afterwards, digital data were made invulnerable as soon as possible by taking them offline and deleting all recordings from Skype messenger (Palys & Atchison, 2012). While not a complete guarantee, these several measures, in conjunction with the minimal risk of the study, cemented that concerns pertaining to participant confidentiality were likely nullified (Lo Iacono et al., 2016).

Upon first meeting in person or digitally, participants were provided with an information sheet which outlined the nature of the current study and its objectives. Participants were advised of the importance of informed consent, and their ability to refuse questions, terminate interviews prematurely, or remove their interview data from the study. If participants had no further questions and agreed to be recorded for the interview, a voice recorder (or the Skype recording function for online interviews) was powered on and the interview commenced. Individual interviews were conducted in a single session that took between 45-60 minutes to complete. Afterwards, data were transferred to a secure laptop only accessible through a fingerprint passcode. Data were transcribed thereafter, and all potential identifying information was removed, with pseudonyms being employed to avoid potential re-linkage. Upon the completion of transcriptions, interviews were then coded and thematically analyzed in NVivo, a multifaceted computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS).

## Analysis

Given the richness of the interviews and the inability to use all the information that was gathered (Cresswell, 2016), the thematic analysis required a significant attention to detail. As such, the nature of the cyclical coding process (Saldana, 2016) evidently made patience and reflexivity crucial in this stage. After an initial round of lean coding, the grounded thematic development process evolved over several iterations during a one-month span. Keeping in line

with Cresswell's (2016) recommendation of five to seven main themes, an intensive analysis resulted in the emergence of five main themes: 1) The Hat-trick of Racism, and its sub-theme 2) Beneath the Surface of the Ice, which focused on the differing racial transgressions; 3) What the Fans Don't See – Behind Closed Doors, which highlighted the difficulties that participants faced in the aftermath of incidents; 4) A Systemic Failure to Protect Minorities; and 5) From Diesel to Electric: The Evolving Vehicle of Racial Transgressions. Each is considered below.

## Results

### 1. The Hat-trick of Racism

A hat-trick in hockey refers to an accomplishment when a player scores three goals in a game. Variations of the feat such as the *Gordie Howe Hat-trick* have also been coined, which occurs when a player scores a goal, records an assist, and gets into a fight during the same game. Unbeknownst to most in the game, participants from the current study shed light on another variation of the achievement, though it is not an achievement at all. Minority hockey players have consistently experienced the *Hat-trick of Racism* – the direct verbal incidents; the physical punishments; and the underlying oppression.

The direct verbal incidents were by far and away the most common form of racism endured. All participants began dealing with verbal slurs and taunts from a young age, which has continued for many throughout their hockey careers. Hakim[4] was only 10 years of age when he was sitting on the bench during a game, and an opposing player skated by, calling him a *dirty Hindu* out of the blue. Similar first-time memories were recounted by other participants such as Ajay, who at a similar age was told by an opponent that he *smelt like curry*, and proceeded to have a barrage of racial slurs hurled at him – all during a stoppage of play. It should be noted that it was not simply slurs that were used by opponents, and racial taunts were also in play as evidenced by Andre:

> We were playing a rival team in junior… One of their players came in front of the net and tried to trip me, so he ended up taking a penalty. I remember their coach was losing it on the bench, and I was chirping one of their other players. Then, that player that I chirped skated by and made monkey references at me, and their coach started to laugh, thinking it was cool… This really started to haunt me, and my mind was like, "is this the type of stuff I'm going to have deal with just because I'm Black?"

It would be a fallacy to suggest that these acts and gestures were limited to opposing players, as fans and parents were also active in the transmission of racism. During an on ice warmup before a game when Andre was trying to focus, he advised that a kid once yelled through the camera hole along the rink glass for Andre to *go back to basketball* – as if the added stressor of racial segregation looming in the back of one's mind was required before the intense competition of a professional sport.

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[4] All names cited in this paper, including players and any other individuals referred to in player quotes are pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of all involved.

Hakim recalled that as a 15-year old, after hitting an opposing player on the backcheck which resulted in the net being dislodged, an adult at the game yelled a derogatory slur which was capped off with *turbinator.* Provided that many adult spectators at minor hockey games are parents, it would seem reasonable to speculate that the act was also perpetrated by a parent of the opposing team. Yet, friends of opposing players also jumped into the action, as evidenced by Ajay's experience at a similar age:

> I got into a fight during the game and got kicked out. So, as I walked into the lobby, five or six friends of the opponent that I fought from the other team were waiting around and started yelling at me, "you fucking Hindu, you don't know how to fight!"…I was a little worried that it would get physical, so I just kept walking through as they taunted me. There were other people around and nobody stepped in or said anything.

Participant experiences thus far have highlighted the lack of boundaries pertaining to the exposure of racism in a verbal and a gestured context. However, these lack of boundaries are further evidenced in the physical transgressions of racism, which ranged from minor *scraps* to full on *donnybrooks*. Peter recalled quite vividly how as a 15-year-old playing in a rural town, he was cross-checked into the net by an opposing player and called a chink right as a stoppage of play occurred. Luckily, another player on the opposition who knew Peter halted his teammate from any further aggression.

***If they came at me with it, I expected it, because obviously I'm different - I look different.*[5]**

Participants felt that without verbal slurs, it was tough to gauge whether over-the-top physicality by opponents were racially-motivated due to the inherent hitting and slashing already prevalent within the sport. As a result of hockey's violent nature, physical acts of racist intent are often overlooked by spectators and referees, although the implications and pain for those who endure it are very real. Consider the opinions you would form on perceptions of 'the bad guy' as a spectator who just witnessed Stanley's incident at a Junior 'B' game:

> I was in a battle in the corner, and a defenseman and I got tied up, chirping and crosschecking. The play started going back the other way, and we were trailing up the ice quite slow, hacking back and forth. He then insulted me and called me a chug. I just snapped in that moment - I turned around, sucker punched him, took him to the ground, and we started going at it.

As a spectator, the true happenings of Stanley's event would be difficult to discern, seeing as the instigation of the racial slur likely would not have been heard by others, which harks back to the dynamic and ever-changing nature of the game. The adage of *hockey being the fastest game on Earth* certainly holds merit, and racial incidents can arise just as swiftly.

## 2. Beneath the Surface of the Ice

The third component in the *Hat-Trick of Racism*, the underlying micro-inequities, was deemed to require its own theme because of how inherently distinguished this type of racism was.

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[5] Nobu

Whereas the motives in the blatant attacks were clear with little hidden in its intent, the underlying oppressions in hockey were often speculative and mysterious. Participants often simultaneously described feeling included in the group as a hockey player, while still being given the message of not belonging. Furthermore, participants also expressed that they often felt that decisions about their playing career were made on vague grounds that may or may not have had a racist foundation.

Stanley was unsure how to respond to a question about the right way to phrase such oppressions, before admitting simply that it was hard to explain. Later in the interview, Stanley reflected on being put in difficult situations where players on his own team would laugh over jokes about Indigenous people, which placed him in the conflicting positions of either laughing and playing along, or calling out his own peers. This double bind was also reflected by Nobu growing up, who recognized the importance of fitting in as *one of the boys,* being especially cognizant of his behaviour as an inclusion tactic amongst his White teammates, knowing that he looked different. While not particularly cautious of his behaviour in the same sense as Nobu, Peter felt the laser sharp stares among teammates, fully aware that he was more often than not the only minority in the locker room. Similarly, in a small town where *hockey is the community, and the community is hockey*, Andre also received baffling looks after he first walked into (ironically enough) a Don Cherry's Pub upon signing with the local team, not knowing at the time that he had nearly doubled the Black population of the town because there was only one Black family in the community.

***I felt like I had to work twice as hard as other players. I didn't want to get to the point where I blamed it on my skin colour, but it's definitely crept into my mind.[6]***

While the glares and stares were eventually shrugged off by participants who learned to deal with the harsh reality as outliers in the game, the underlying tactics affected many on a deeper level. With a multitude of factors involved in decisions about players' futures, decisions based on racist grounds could be embedded into a sea of justification that appeals to other legitimate performance-based attributes. Perhaps it was the blatant instances, and the frequency with which others turned a blind eye, that made the more negative possibility a plausible one. When asked whether participants ever felt that they had been cut from a team or held back in their career based on race, five participants entertained such thoughts. Establishing tangible clarity from those gut-wrenching feelings proved rather difficult, but when faced with racist behaviour for the crime of loving the sport, and when decisions about playing time or making the team were negative, it was hard not to wonder whether their race or cultural background entered into the equation. Peter reckoned that when the last spot on the team came down to what was essentially a coin flip on whether to retain a minority or a White player, the White player would almost always be selected. Ajay had similar thoughts run amok when after being the last cut from the Bantam AAA team, he was met with an aggressive and demeaning AA coach who never displayed such behaviour to White players, and who cut him almost immediately with little rationale provided.

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[6] Andre

Being unable to get rid of the pit in his stomach after also being cut from his Bantam AAA team as a returning player, Hakim sought the insight of his folks, peers, and community, only to make some shocking discoveries. The quote below is gripping in the way it captures just how career impacting and deep-rooted this issue was:

> In my second year of Bantam, we had a new coach named Dusty, who was quite high up in the provincial ranks. Having played on the team last year, I did super well at tryouts but got cut which took me by surprise. In my exit meeting, Dusty said that I wasn't physically strong enough to play on the team, even though at 14 years old, I was already 5'10 and 180 pounds… He also said that my effort was a contributing reason for being cut, which left me so confused and devastated to the point where I legitimately thought about quitting hockey. I was like, "No, I'm done. I'm never playing hockey again." You know, like being a first year in Bantam and playing AAA, if you don't really fuck up, you're staying on the team. So, my dad called Dusty after the 24-hour buffer period, and the same excuses were provided.
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> Soon after, I found out that two years prior, Dusty had coached some Indo-Canadian guys that I knew. As it so happened, Dusty always had them in the doghouse. Even though one of the players, Dev, was that team's captain, he was in the doghouse the whole year. Dusty stripped the captaincy from Dev for half of the season, even though he was hands down the best player and a good role model. The difference with Dev is that he was too good to cut… You couldn't cut him because at the time, Dev was supposed to be a top 5 major junior draft pick, but his stock dropped, likely because of how Dusty treated him.
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> There was one more incident too. I used to train with Joe, the father of an NHL player. My dad and him got chatting, and Joe said that Dusty had tried to do the same thing with his son, but like Dev, his son was just too good to cut. There were totally instances like that growing up where Dusty would take a White kid over a minority. (Hakim)

There were few viable solutions for these minority hockey players when faced with such occurrences. Even if they had strong suspicion of foul play, evidence as gathered in Hakim's case was difficult to obtain in most other instances. Furthermore, recognizing that they were outliers, participants were often concerned as to not cause a stink or stand out even more than they did. As Szto (2018) put it, racialized citizens were so focused on absorbing into the *Whitestream* and integrating into stereotypical Canadian culture, many felt that shedding light on the matter would not help their endeavours. Thus, these minority players were left with few options but to keep skating up the frozen Whitestream in hopes of eventually being on an equal footing with their other teammates.

## 3. What the Fans Don't See: Under the Skin

The perception of hockey as stoic, heroic, and physically dominant (Robidoux, 2002) has created a breeding ground for toxic masculine culture. When this masculine culture is intertwined with *the unwritten code of hockey* and some of its ideals of not outwardly displaying melancholic and pensive emotion, behavioural expectations of *ought to's and ought*

*not to's* are cast onto its players. The participants in the current study certainly felt this restrictive emotionality in play during their careers.

Nobu agreed to the notion of not outwardly displaying emotion, noting that any reaction to an incident was a tactical advantage for the other team in getting under skin. Although Ajay often felt mortified and shamed over the incidents that he was subjected to, he was uncertain of how to handle himself while the game was still going on. Lucas believed a large stigma loomed over player's heads when it came to discussing incidents such as racism in hockey after the game, perhaps reflecting the adage that *what happens on the ice should stay on the ice*. Evidently, participants were hampered by a notion of *damned if you do, and damned if you don't*, with no 'proper' place on or off the ice to address what was happening.

***I felt humiliated and embarrassed. Um… Kind of weak. I didn't know what to do.[7]***

While 'masculine' culture has become ingrained at such an early age for players in the sport, the impenetrable façade quickly disappeared for many once behind closed doors. Hakim discussed similar sentiments of emotion and hopelessness. On one occasion, after being called a terrorist in a game as a young teenager, he broke down and started questioning whether he should even be playing the game. Andre echoed similar feelings of breaking down when after having racial epithets thrown at him by an opponent, his friend on the other team who was also Black added salt to the wound by opting to stick up for the perpetrator. For these participants, it became evident that such denounced emotion inevitably slipped through when faced with the reality of "being hurt because somebody used your race against you in a sport" (Lucas).

## 4. A Systemic Failure to Protect Minorities

The hopelessness that was often displayed in the aftermath of racial events became a regular reaction for many when faced with the harsh reality that despite the piling up of incidents, little was done by the protective systems in place. This lack of action may reflect Joseph, Darnell, and Nakamura's (2012) view that because Canadian sport has been treated as race-less instead of involving a diversity of races, the result has been a lack of progressive action to mitigate racialized events. Simply put, the very measures in place to counter such incidents often let these participants down.

On one hand, most participants agreed that on-ice officials did not condone racialized incidents and acted accordingly when detected. For example, Peter recalled a time when a referee came up to him after being advised by a third party that an opponent had, unbeknownst to Peter, yelled a slur at him. Similarly, Lucas discussed how officials have started to become more liberal in handing out severe penalties for such incidents. However, participants also qualified the former by mentioning that while proactive when detected, the combination of the sport's fast paced setting and the nature of the game's officiating (i.e., officials often standing along the boards) made it difficult to detect non-visual infractions such as racial slurs. Nobu discussed that when he was subject to incidents, nothing was done by referees as they simply did not bear witness to them. At the same time, some referees even added to the offence by turning a

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[7] Ajay

willful blind eye, such as in Andre's monkey gesture incident, which caused an uproar among his coaches. Furthermore, when a fan of the opponent yelled racial slurs at Andre at an away game, the security guard who was only a short distance away refused to escort the perpetrator out of the building because the slurs "weren't even that bad."

### *Oh, you can't stand up for yourself?* [8]

This sentiment expressed by Ajay cast a dim light on the fear of participants coming forward with allegations for worries of a lack of resolve. Similar to referees, coaches who often directly witnessed the incidents were willing to stand up for their players. However, those coaches who did not witness incidents themselves often would tell players to *shove it under the rug*. Yet, while many coaches and referees were at least partially attuned to the on-going issues, less appeared to be done as incidents climbed up the chain of command. Stanley was concerned that trying to push for a league reprimand of a perpetrator after one of his incidents would simply result in a hearsay battle and a rejection of his claim. Hakim treaded similar lines and commented that while the governing association was notified when he was called a terrorist, nothing was done because the perpetrator lied about the occurrence of the event. Even worse, in the rare incident when league mandated suspensions were handed out after a line brawl broke out from Andre being the recipient of racial slurs, it was ANDRE – *not the instigator hurling the slurs* – who was handed the 6 game suspension, because the league review of the game footage only captured the visual of the brawl, and not the audio of the slurs. As a result of the inadequate measures in place, most participants resorted to doing their best to simply brush incidents off, knowing full well that little would be done even if they spoke up about it.

### 5. From Diesel to Electric: The Evolving Vehicle of Racial Transgressions

Finally, conflicting opinions were formed when participants were asked whether they had continued to experience racism in the same ways and frequencies that they had in the past. A positive finding was that participants noted a decline in direct acts of racism in hockey as they entered their adulthood. This may be related to the development of players from childhood through to adulthood, and their understanding of acceptable boundaries during competition. It could similarly be due to a changing of the times in society; or likely a little of both. Peter and Lucas were under the impression that especially at the younger ages, it was a *monkey see, monkey do* mentality, where players would learn to use racial epithets from their parents or peers. These thoughts were echoed by Ajay, who added that incidents were most prevalent throughout his teenage years, when his opponents were unfamiliar with cultures and felt it appropriate to include race as a means to a perceived tactical advantage. Hakim noted that in more recent times, a combination of maturity at the collegiate level and a slowly emerging cultural sensitivity has contributed to an overall decline in incidents. While Lucas acknowledged that the incidents still occur, he felt that because coaches and referees have penalized events more heavily in recent times, the deterrence factor may have resulted in a decrease of overall occurrences.

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[8] Ajay

*Racism has taken on a shell - it's hidden. It's not blunt and outright in its form, but it's there.*[9]

While the general decline in direct verbal events may be a positive indication of improvement, a critical consideration to be had is that the medium of racial transgressions has simply shifted. While Stanley acknowledged that an awareness on the issue has increased, the underlying incidents have persisted, and pointed to the ambivalent feelings that minorities encounter with racial jokes. Peter agreed that while it was often tough to explain, it was definitely still there. Similarly, Ajay advised that such issues were a matter of standpoint in that, "while a person of colour would pick it up, a person not of colour simply could not," further adding:

> There's just things to look at when I have kids. Do I want to put my kids in hockey? Do I want them to experience the things I experienced? …I guess I was able to cope with those things, but who knows if my kid would be able to, or if the incidents were worse in their situations… it might limit them in different areas of life, and they might be more hesitant to do things.

Ultimately, even if the context has changed, the end game has not. Despite an acknowledgement that the overt racial incidents have been reduced, the skepticism has persisted for many of the participants. A distrustful relationship between minorities and hockey has been created, and there is no easy way to shake it.

## Discussion

Shedding light on the experiences of minority hockey players, findings from the current study revealed that the idea of *hockey for everyone* is spurious, and little more than a quaint saying for a bumper-sticker. Employing an inductive grounded approach, critical race theory (CRT) would appear to offer appropriate theoretical constructs to capture the traumas that these participants have endured. From an ontological viewpoint, CRT posits that race has been treated as a hierarchical institutional system (Crenshaw, 2011; Szto, 2018), whereby underlying mechanisms have served to keep *White ways of the world* atop the pedestal while undermining others. Although CRT initially began as a movement in law, the scope of the theory has expanded to include the very foundations of liberal order, equality, reasoning, and behaviour to better comprehend the standpoint that distinguishes life for those in differing racial lines (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Where hockey is both metaphorically and literally 'life' for many of these participants, racial lines have unfortunately created barriers in their experiences. In all facets of the game, the very building blocks that have contributed to the creation of a tremendous sport were also the same facets that often let our participants down. As Hakim questioned after one incident, "wow, is it really worth it? should I even be playing hockey?"

### Is it Really Worth it?

Despite such experiences, an unwavering love of the game was ecstatically declared by participants. Stanley even qualified a response during the interview by highlighting that while the incidents were a lot to handle, "I would never trash on the game of hockey," – as if to

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[9] Stanley

suggest that he was committing a sin by discussing the issues prevalent within the sport. This consensus as shared by others harks back to Allen's (as cited in Kidd, 2013) argument of hockey as Canada's "religion," and Black's (2011) statement that criticisms of hockey have often resulted in the "evoking of patriotic heresy" (p. 42). While statements of relief and satisfaction emerged from the many participants that have been reluctant to talk about these challenges, it is evident that changes within organizations, leagues, and agencies need to be made.

When asked about what could be done to reduce racism in the game, various ideas emerged, especially at the minor hockey level. While it is the norm for players to be subjected to team/league mandated seminars pertaining to a variety of matters, none of the participants described being educated on race-related issues. Thus, as young players are uneducated on race-related matters in the sport, and are unlikely or unable to read the association's handbook on their own, there is a level of ambiguity that is present for young players, which leads to two recommendations. Leagues and governing bodies should not only look to promote educational seminars on acceptable boundaries within the spirit of competition, but also instill a clear outline of denounced conduct that is easily comprehended by its players. As Beccaria (1764/2009) argued many centuries ago, laws have no use and no deterrence value, if they are not readily interpretable by the very people who are expected to follow them. Lastly, Lucas felt that increased inter-agency collaborations through an independent reporting hotline could break the stigmatized silence on the issue and burst the previously sealed pipes of dialogue. If executed properly, such a system could easily identify the true extent of the problem from year to year, and efficiently address problematic players.

## Limitations and Future Research

While not necessarily a limitation in its own right, the biggest challenge in conducting this research came at the point of positionality and reflexivity. I echo the sentiments of Styres, Zinga, Bennett, and Bomberry (2010) that it took some time to recognize the dynamics of my multilayered role within both hockey and research. As a former hockey player who is still involved in the game as a coach, I found myself consistently juggling the roles of a researcher and life-long enthusiast of the sport. Having been so involved in the game, I naturally became very close to the research at times. Such notion was most impacted by the time coding came about, as I had to take some steps back and time off between coding rounds before the realization truly set in on the similarity of incidents that players endured. As Smith (1999) posed, inside researchers often find themselves testing their own taken-for-granted views, to which I was no different.

Yet, being an inside researcher was also a tremendous benefit. I found the flow of dialogue with participants to be smooth given my knowledge of the game and the specific vocabulary involved, which is sometimes challenging given the often complicated vernacular used by hockey players.[10] I felt that my position as a *hockey mind* was particularly helpful for participants as it created a level of comfort and safe space to discuss sensitive matters

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[10] See Lennox (2008) and Sequin (2020) for an overview of some argot that outside investigators would need to become accustomed to when investigating the sport.

traditionally shunned in the sport's hyper-masculine culture. This sense of belonging was a challenge experienced by Szto (2018), who as an Asian-Canadian woman, was often perceived to be an outsider to hockey culture, which initially posed small barriers in her work with South Asian hockey players. Ultimately, I am grateful and honoured that these participants felt comfortable enough to discuss their experiences with me.

While only seven participants were interviewed in the current study, the emergence of a homogeneity of themes pertaining to racism suggests that there may be potential generalizability. However, this study categorized all minorities as a whole. As it is certainly possible that hockey players from various minority races may experience the sport differently, comparisons among different minority groups should be considered in future research. In addition, future research should continue to investigate the phenomenon with a special focus on incorporating theoretical and methodological triangulation in an effort to strengthen validity.

## Conclusion

It has become clear that Canadian rhetoric has painted an incomplete picture of multiculturalism in hockey. As Szto (2018) put it, the negotiations between hockey and diversity have just now started to emerge *because* hockey has lacked such prior diversity. The current study contributed to this negotiation of diversity by painting a more comprehensive picture of the experiences that minority hockey players have endured. Through the lens of purposive participants who shared their own experiences (Hylton, 2005), an enhanced body of knowledge pertinent to racialization within hockey was created, challenging traditional epistemologies about the sport (Gunaratnam, 2003). In conclusion, consider this begrudging but necessary thought: If hockey is an artifact reflective of Canadian culture, then taking the experiences of these minority hockey players into account, *what does this say about Canadian culture?*

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# Foster Parent Perspectives on Successful Placements in Care

## Taline Blakley

**Abstract.** Success in foster care is important for the development and continued well-being of children and youth in care. In determining what placements will or will not be successful, the insight and experiences of foster parents are important to consider. In consultation with foster parents in Canada, this study aimed to determine an appropriate definition of successful placements, as well as identify factors that foster parents view to be important in ensuring the success of foster care placements. Four themes were noted to be particularly salient throughout interview and survey responses, which were security, adaptability, family environment, and communication. Both the definition of successful placement and the components important for ensuring successful placements were consistent with previous literature. Foster parents also discussed a fifth theme – support for children who age out of the system – which is important to mention when considering the continued success of foster children beyond care.

## Introduction

Foster care is one of a few options that social services has when a child is removed from their home due to abuse, neglect, or other life-threatening conditions (Ministry of Social Services, n.d.), where a child falls under the legal guardianship of the government and is placed in a private home to receive care.

According to Statistics Canada (2017), the 2016 Census saw over 28,000 children in care. Though this number is similar to what was reported on the 2011 Census (Statistics Canada, 2012), prior to this, foster children in Canada were not counted on the Census, so it is difficult to ascertain whether this number is increasing or decreasing. Though this is not a statistically large portion of the Canadian population, this group represents one of the most vulnerable populations in the country. These children and youth have often faced unimaginable levels of trauma, abuse, or neglect, and protection and support for them is an important responsibility of not only social services, but of those who have chosen to be a part of their lives as foster parents.

The goals of foster care placements include providing children with a safe family environment where they can form positive relationships, with the ultimate goal being the reunification of children with biological families if it becomes safe (Saskatchewan Foster Families Association [SFFA], n.d.-a). Predicting which foster care placements are likely to be successful in helping to

obtain these goals is of interest in order to be able to place foster children in homes in which they are likely to succeed.

## Literature Review

In determining factors that may be facilitative of a successful placement, first, a working definition of successful placement must be formulated. Previous literature has defined a successful placement as one that does not result in breakdown or removal from the home (Miller et al., 2019; Randle, 2013). Randle (2013) investigated the perspectives of former foster children, whose definition of a successful placement focused on their feelings while they were in that placement. Foster children were found to talk about a successful placement being a place where they felt happy and did not have to worry about being moved to another foster home. Successful placements were viewed to be those where they could stay as long as was needed (Randle, 2013). Research by Miller et al. (2019) defined success in foster care using a dichotomy based on whether the placement was continuous, or had resulted in a breakdown and placement change.

Research has also identified factors that may be linked to successful placements or successful fostering. Miller et al. (2019) analyzed the characteristics of foster parents that are predictive of placement breakdown or continuous placements. Foster parents of children in continuous placements were found to be better able to understand the emotions of others, have higher levels of social support from their own family, and higher quality relationship with their partners. Foster parents in continuous placements were also found to have higher levels of satisfaction in their role as a foster parent. In the research conducted by Randle (2013), in addition to providing an explanation for successful placements, former foster children discussed aspects that were found in those homes. They mentioned feeling loved and accepted by everyone in the household and feeling as though they had people around who would help them. They also indicated foster parents being able to understand children and their behaviours, and being flexible to the needs of each child, were more conducive to a successful placement. (Randle, 2013). Foster children in this study also viewed good communication between parents and children and with social workers were indicative of a successful placement (Randle, 2013).

As noted, research has been conducted on the notion of successful placements and factors associated with them, but there have been few studies that look specifically at foster parents' perspectives on these concepts, particularly in Canadian contexts. In one study, Brown and Campbell (2007) determined that foster parents viewed foster care success as defined by either reunification with biological family, placement stability, or adoption. Several outcomes that could be expected from a successful placement were identified, which included "security for child, family connections, good relationships, positive family change, seamless agency involvement, and child grow[th]" (Brown & Campbell, 2007, p. 1010). In a subsequent study, Brown (2008) identified factors that foster parents believed to be necessary for successful placements. These included possessing certain personality characteristics and skills, having information about the child, a relationship with the agency, access to personalized services, support from the community, extended family, and other foster parents, as well as needing to

look after the self. Oke et al. (2013) also reported several themes that were present in what foster parents considered to be successful placements, such as emotional bonding between parent and child, positive relationships with social services, parental flexibility to the child's needs, and resilience.

The perspectives of foster parents are important because they are the ones providing care and interacting directly with foster children. The opinions and experiences of foster parents are valuable and necessary to consider, particularly when determining things that may contribute to the well-being of foster children. Similar to both Brown and Campbell (2007) and Brown (2008), the current study aims to define successful placement according to the perspectives of foster parents, as well as identify key themes that foster parents believe to be necessary for achieving successful placements.

## Methods

The current study included a survey as well as semi-structured interviews. Participants were obtained through both criterion sampling, where participants were selected based on certain characteristics (i.e., they were foster parents), as well as snowball sampling, where individuals who were identified as foster parents passed a survey on to other foster parents (Berg, 2001).

### Survey

A survey regarding foster parent perspectives on successful placement was created and distributed electronically to foster parents via a snowball sampling method. There were ten responses for the survey. The answers from two respondents were removed because their answer to the question "Are you a foster parent?" was "No, and I never have been." One survey respondent indicated that they would like to be contacted for an interview, so their responses to survey questions were discussed during their interview. The seven remaining survey respondents were from British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. Among the respondents, 6 were currently fostering children, while 1 had previously fostered. The average number of years of experience as a foster parent was 20, and between the 7 respondents, they had cared for over 230 children throughout their time as foster parents.

### Interviews

Two foster parent interviews were conducted for this study. The participant for one of the interviews, Emily,[1] was recruited via criterion sampling. Emily has been a foster parent with her spouse for over 6 years in Saskatchewan. They have had 18 children throughout this time, including the 6 currently in their care.[2] The participants for the other interview were identified from the survey responses. Roger and Annie are a married couple who have been foster parents for 29 years in Saskatchewan, during which time they have fostered over 50 children.

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[1] Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants.
[2] While Saskatchewan's Ministry of Social Services typically allows a maximum of four foster children in a home, exceptions are made for placement of siblings or placement of children who have previously lived in the same foster home, both of which are reasons for Emily having six children in her care (SFFA, n.d.-b).

Though Roger and Annie have not had any children in their home for about a year, they remain active foster parents who will be accepting more children into their home in the near future.

At the beginning of each phone interview, participants were read aloud a consent statement, which indicated to them that their responses would remain confidential, and that they were free to decline answering any questions or withdraw at any point throughout the study. The interview began after obtaining verbal consent as well as permission to audio record the conversation.

## Analysis

Following the interviews, they were transcribed. Transcriptions and survey responses were analyzed and coded, and then codes were combined into themes. A definition of a successful placement emerged, as well as four main themes that are important factors in a successful foster care placement: security, adaptability, family connection, and communication. A fifth theme that was not a factor in successful placements but of interest to foster child well-being was the process of aging out of care.

## Results and Discussion

### Successful Placements

Among the explanations of successful placement that arose throughout the interviews and survey responses, a recurring theme was that of home stability. From a foster parent perspective, it seems that success is noted by a child being able to stay in one home for a significant period of time – ideally until they are able to return to their biological family. Emily provided the following understanding of a successful placement:

> Kids come in, birth parent gets what they need in order to be successful parents themselves, and kids get to go home…When kids come in, they go to one foster home, without bouncing around – the more homes they go to the more detrimental that is to them.

This sentiment was echoed by Annie, who also explained that foster parents need to work towards creating a successful placement:

> We had one boy that was in 26 homes before he came here, and he stayed here for 4 years… You have to think of the kids, what they're going through… You can't say, "Well why is he doing that, I don't want that here, so he's gotta go" – you have to try and work through things. So, a successful placement to me would be, that a child's placed in your home, he stays there as long as possible, as long as needed.

The understanding of placement success as being determined by whether a child is able to stay in the home for however long is necessary was also evident in survey responses. One response indicated that a successful placement would be one that is "safe, appropriate, and definite until a more permanent situation can be found for the child," and another mentioned that it would be "long term."

Altogether, the definition of successful placement that was discussed in both of the interviews was one where foster children are in a home that is able to continuously provide for them. The idea that children are able to stay in that home, hopefully for the duration of their stay in out-of-home care, was prevalent. In addition to this definition being supported by survey responses, it is also consistent with explanations found in previous research (Miller et al., 2019; Randle, 2013), indicating that results obtained are generalizable beyond the current sample. In particular, this definition is similar to the one formulated by foster parents in the Brown and Campbell (2007) study, which also found placement stability as an important correlate of placement success.

Further discussion of successful placements in foster care in the interviews gave rise to several factors that foster parents view to be important for ensuring a successful placement. The themes identified from the interviews were security, adaptability, family connections, and communication

## Security

One overarching theme that became evident in ensuring a successful placement was security. In order to make sure that a foster home is an environment in which a child is able to stay for a significant period of time, foster parents believe that children need to feel safe and secure in their surroundings. Entering a new foster home, whether it be their first or fifteenth, is an unfamiliar and oftentimes frightening experience for children, and being able to recognize and attend to their needs is crucial. As stated by Emily:

> Kids are scared usually, right? When they come into care. So they need you to be that calm, fill-in, parental role, and be able to provide comfort, or to provide structure, and provide, you know, that reassuring nature of "this place is safe, and you *do* have food, and you *don't* have to worry and you *don't* have to look after your sister" and that reassurance constantly.

Providing children with a sense of security might come from consistency within the home, particularly if a child has come from an especially chaotic environment. Roger discussed the importance of being consistent in terms of house schedules, including mealtimes and bedtimes:

> Consistency is huge, because well, it just helps make you feel secure… Y'know people say "Oh just love 'em." That's just a foolish, silliest [*sic*] statement. Because you can't feel love if you don't feel secure, so if they feel secure, then after a while they'll feel loved, and y'know you'll go from there.

The idea of routines being important to a successful placement was also visible in the survey responses. In many instances, foster children have come from homes and families where they experienced neglect (Greeson et al., 2011), and therefore security and consistency were likely lacking. As a result, children may take a while to learn that their foster parents are people who they can depend on to provide for them. Buehler et al. (2003) also found that foster parents felt that providing a child with feelings of safety and security was an essential component to showing them love, which was considered to be an important facet of successful placements.

Along with the importance of a parent being physically present in the home, Annie discussed the importance of being able to assure children that meals will be available for them:

> They have to know that they aren't going to go hungry, not for school lunches, not for any meals. That we're going to be here when they get home from school or wherever they're at, they aren't going to come home and be alone.

This was a sentiment that was echoed by Emily as well. Previous research has found that food-related problem behaviours, such as hoarding food, are increased among youth who have a history of neglect or abuse, a population that is well-represented in the foster system (Casey et al., 2012; Helton et al., 2017). Emily has experienced this type of behaviour with children she has fostered:

> Our two oldest used to hide food. They still do sometimes. They would hide food, whether it be in their car seats or under their pillows… I mean you could open the fridge and it would be full and the cupboards would be full, but they didn't know where the next meal was gonna come from, no matter what you tell them… It takes a really, really long time for them to trust that there's gonna be another meal when it's mealtime.

As this behaviour may be a response to not having reliable access to food in their past, it would follow that showing children that they can feel secure in knowing that their foster parents will continue to provide for them would be one way to try to address this behaviour. However, there has not been much research into how food-related problem behaviours should be dealt with by foster parents (Helton et al., 2017).

As well as assuring children that their basic needs, such as food, will be taken care of, foster parents must also assure children that they are not going to be kicked out of the home because of an incident. Annie discussed how, after acknowledging that something has gone wrong, she and Roger prefer to move on from that incident, rather than dwelling on it:

> You don't, for the next two days, go "Well, you remember when…" – you talk about it, it's done with. And that gives them the feeling that they're okay. That's how I take it anyways, they don't feel like, "Oh no, what's going to happen to me now?" because too many of them have been moved from home to home because of some small altercation.

As a result of multiple placement moves, children might feel that the slightest incident of bad behaviour or disagreement with foster parents will get them kicked out of the house. In recalling an experience where a foster child had frequent behavioural outbursts, Annie mentioned the insecurity that the child would feel afterwards, and the role of foster parents in helping children deal with their emotions:

> She would say "Don't you hate me, aren't you mad at me?" She said that for days after she had one of her things. You just have to hug her and say, "No, we'll work on solving it."

Survey responses also mentioned the responsibility of foster parents to help foster children "develop their emotional and social self – guide them through their behavioural choices." Not

only do foster parents have to assure children that they will not be moved, but also demonstrate stability and consistency in their responses to behaviours of the child.

Throughout the interviews, Roger and Annie seemed to place more of an emphasis on assuring children that behavioural issues would not cause them to be shuffled to a different home than Emily did. This might be for two reasons: Roger and Annie are a therapeutic foster home, which means that they provide care for children with higher behavioural, social, or developmental needs than non-therapeutic homes (Ministry of Social Services, n.d.). As a result of this, Roger and Annie may have had more experience with children who have behavioural issues, and therefore this issue is more prevalent in their experience. Another explanation might be that Roger and Annie have typically cared for older children – Emily's current children range in age from 2 to 11, though they have not fostered any children who were older than 5 when they first arrived. Throughout their foster parenting experience, Roger and Annie have fostered children from age 4 to 19. It is likely that Roger and Annie's foster children, being generally older, have faced more placement instability in their foster care experiences, and as a result have a higher level of uncertainty about staying in one place than the younger children that Emily has cared for.

The varying ideas about how to provide security across these two experiences is an example of the next theme that arose from the interviews, which is adaptability.

## Adaptability

In order for foster children to feel security in their placement, their needs have to be met by foster parents. Because of the unique needs of every child, and especially those of children in the foster care system, being adaptable to the varying necessities of every child that comes into the home is an important aspect of a successful placement that became apparent throughout the interviews. Discussion of creating a successful placement brought up the idea that foster children may have differing needs in terms of their physical environment:

> Those things that the child would need for them to feel safe, I mean it might look a little different for some kids. Some kids, they might need a door that shuts on their bedroom, other kids might need no door on their bedroom, right? (Emily)

One survey response included that, in order to have a successful placement, foster parents must work at "understanding youth needs and being able to meet those needs." In addition to being adaptable to the varying material needs of children, the importance of meeting the differing emotional needs of each child was discussed by Emily as well:

> All of those, kind of, emotional needs, whether it's fear-based, or anger-based, or whatever the child has, you have to be able to be ready to give them, and just to physically be there for whatever they're gonna need in that moment.

Further to the differential needs within foster children populations, foster children have all sorts of histories that foster parents must be willing to acknowledge and incorporate into their daily lives. This is particularly important in Saskatchewan, where around 85% of foster children

are Indigenous (Turner, 2016), but the Ministry of Social Services is often unable to place Indigenous children with culture-matched families, and report a significant need for more Indigenous foster families to match with the high number of Indigenous youth in need of care (CBC News, 2019; Ministry of Social Services, n.d.). While the Truth and Reconcilliation Commission of Canada (2015) has called for governments to both work to reduce the number of Indigenous children in care, as well as ensure that those that are in care can be placed in culturally appropriate homes, foster parents who do have children whose culture is different from their own must work to uphold the cultural beliefs of their foster children's backgrounds. During his interview, Roger acknowledged that there are many aspects of a child's background that have to be taken into account:

> You don't know, like some of them come well, from everything. You never, you'll never know the whole story. And different nationalities and religions and backgrounds and likes and dislikes, so you have to, y'know, be adaptable.

The need to support a youth's cultural background and other aspects of their family's identity is evident (Brown et al., 2009), and survey responses showed support for the necessity of acknowledging a child's culture as well, through the response that home stability requires "giving [the] child [a] sense of culture and history".

Not only do foster parents have to be adaptable to the varying needs of foster children that they interact with, but they also have to recognize that in many ways, parenting foster children has different demands than what might be found when parenting biological children. Throughout the interviews, the idea that foster children require a slightly higher level of attention was apparent. In addition to having to create a relationship with foster children that likely already exists with biological children, foster parents may need to be sensitive to an increased fear of abandonment:

> If you have a little one in front of the TV and you're just running to the backyard for a minute, they might panic and think they're alone, right? The other, typical kid, or kid who's never been in care, would walk to the backyard and be like "Oh, is so-and-so in the backyard?" Right? So some of those things look very different, so you have to be mindful, you know? And sometimes all it takes is "Hey, I'm going to the backyard" but you have to be mindful of those things that you might take for granted otherwise.

This reflects an aspect of successful placements previously mentioned by foster parents, which indicates that foster parents need to identify where a child stands on various measures of need, and then "start [working from] where the child is" (Oke et al., 2013, p. 16).

Oftentimes, being adaptable to individual needs and behaviours of foster children requires, in part, an understanding of trauma-based behaviour, as evidenced by the need for increased sensitivity to things that may trigger negative reactions in foster children. Both Emily and Annie expressed prevalence of trauma among foster child populations:

> 100% of kids that come into care have suffered trauma. And you can say 100% because being taken away is trauma, whether they've had you know, experienced any typical

> trauma prior to that, being taken away, from your, whoever, is considered trauma. (Emily)

> Personally, I believe that any child that's removed from their home has trauma, because just being moved from your home forcefully is trauma. (Annie)

Though rates of trauma in foster care populations is difficult to determine, one study has found that up to 70% of children in the child welfare system have been exposed to complex trauma (Greeson et al., 2011). Complex trauma exposure refers to exposure to physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, domestic violence, or neglect, and emphasizes the developmental impairments that can result from exposure in childhood further than what is accounted for by posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Cook et al., 2017). Because of the many areas of functioning and development that can be affected by exposure to trauma in childhood and adolescence (Cook et al., 2017), this could manifest through a variety of behaviours that foster parents have to be able to recognize and attend to. Roger mentioned a direct effect of previous trauma that one of their foster children had experienced:

> We found out one reason this fellow was so out of control was because he never slept. Maybe 1 or 2 hours. We found out the reason was that he had been told, "When you go to sleep, we'll cut your eyes out". It took a lot but once we got past that he started sleeping, and a big improvement.

Trauma can also show up through deficits in behavioural and emotional regulation, attachment issues, a negative self-concept, or dissociation[3] (Cook et al., 2017),  all of which are issues that foster parents must be prepared to address within the family, as well as with professional help in some cases. Roger provided an example of one foster child whose trauma manifested through difficulty in expressing her emotions appropriately, which many foster homes were not able to manage:

> As soon as things weren't perfect, she was vicious. Like she'd bite, kick, spit, just anything. And we could not understand it. But that, what it was, she was scared. And once we got to that point, she realized there's other ways she could deal with being scared. So she quit that, just like that. But, you know, for a while we couldn't understand what's going on, and she'd been in a lot of homes.

Foster parents must be able to recognize that behavioural or emotional issues may be a response to trauma in the child's past, and must willing and able to adequately attend to issues that might arise. If foster parents are not adaptable to the varying issues that might occur while fostering, children are unlikely to find success in that placement, possibly resulting in a move to another foster or group home. The importance of adaptability was put nicely by Annie:

> In fostering, joy and sorrow live in the same house all the time, and there is no knowing which one will pop up where, when, or why.

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[3] Dissociation refers to the failure to integrate thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations, which may result in behaviours that occur outside of conscious awareness (Cook et al., 2017).

## Family Environment

A third theme that emerged throughout discussions of successful placements was the need for foster children to create relationships with the people within the household, and to be treated as though they are a member of the family. This reflects one of the primary goals of foster care, as noted by Saskatchewan Foster Family Association (SFFA; n.d.-a), which is to "provide children with a family environment, where positive relationships are modelled" (para. 4). Emily and Roger both focused on the idea that the foster family should provide an example to the child of what a healthy family looks like, particularly as most foster children have come from homes where they have not experienced that:

> I mean the goal with fostering is, you go home to a healthy family. So, if you can model what a healthy family looks like in the meantime, I feel like that'll be more successful in the long-term. (Emily)

> Like we try, try, to get along, and in a very positive way, because the kids very often come from homes that weren't, so their idea of a home or a mom and dad are quite negative maybe. (Roger)

In addition to being able to view what a positive family environment looks like, in order to ensure a successful placement, foster families should work to provide familial relationships for foster children. Emily discussed that in a successful placement, these relationships should exist between children within the home:

> Without the connection between children, then it's not really providing, I guess an example of how a family, a healthy family lives and exists. So whether they're called 'foster brother', or whether they're just called 'brother', or whether they're just called by their name, the way they act and behave, it's nice when they act and behave like siblings.

It has been noted that foster children often feel as though they do not belong anywhere as a result of being shuffled between homes and schools, and may lack any significant relationships in their lives (Randle, 2013). Given the importance of attachments between children and caregivers in development (Bowlby, 1988), being able to provide familial relationships in foster care is important to ensure that children can experience successful placements, which will increase their ability of forming attachments to foster parents. Oke et al. (2013) reported that foster parents view strong emotional bonds with foster children as being an important indicator of placement success. Part of forming those bonds with foster parents requires that foster children feel as though they are a part of the family. This idea was reflected in survey responses – one respondent said that "a successful placement would look like being part of the family, with hope, dreams, and goals, the same as a natural child", and another said "a good foster parent will make sure their foster child is not treated differently then [*sic*] any other children, just because they are in care." This notion was also supported in the interviews:

> They have to be treated the same as our own kids…You have to include them in a normal day-to-day life, whatever that means. (Roger)

This is consistent with findings from Randle (2013), who reported that former foster children felt that placements were more successful when foster parents included them in activities, such as going skating or to a family barbeque.

In addition to the perception that a family environment is important in assuring a successful placement, research has shown that family-based care options are preferred to group homes, as the family environment has been found to have better outcomes on academic measures and self-concept measures (Farris-Manning & Zandstra, 2003). The effect on self-concept is particularly notable given that foster children experience high rates of trauma, which has been found to result in the development of a negative self-concept (Cook et al., 2017; Greeson et al., 2011).

## Communication

When asked if there were any other things that they would like to discuss for the interview, participants of both interviews indicated the importance of communication to all aspects of fostering, including ensuring a successful placement. According to Emily:

> The biggest thing I think for fostering and the whole situation to be successful, is communication. That's a big thing that the foster parents are like, begging the Ministry for kind of at this kind of time, because there's definitely a lack of that. So, whether it's between social workers, or birth families, or foster parents, or even like, for me with our extended family, communicating is so key because you do have to raise these kids a little different.

In addition to communication between social services and foster parents being important to child well-being, it is also an important factor in foster parents choosing to continue fostering (Denlinger & Dorius, 2018). Roger specifically mentioned the importance of social workers engaging in honest communication with the foster parents prior to a child being placed with the family:

> Another thing is social services being honest. Like I mean really honest. In fairness to them, sometimes they don't know. Depending on the worker, some workers do not tell you enough, but they do know. Some workers are very good… As far as a successful placement, if you find out down the road, "Oh well this child is this and this", and then, "Oh, I'm not ready for that," you know it's kind of hard to, how do you say, change gears.

Though the importance of foster parents being adaptable has already been addressed, foster parents can be better prepared for the unique challenges that may accompany a particular foster child if the social workers are upfront with them about known issues.

In response to the survey questions about who is responsible for ensuring a successful placement and home stability, responses indicated that everyone involved in a foster child's life must play a part: "The team [is responsible]. Social worker, foster parents and family, biological parent, and foster child." Though communication was not explicitly mentioned, in order for

everyone involved in a child's life to work towards one goal, the well-being of the child, there must be communication among all parties.

The perception of communication being an important factor in successful placements was also apparent in previous research. Randle (2013) reported the perspectives of former foster children, who noted honesty and communication with children and social workers as being facilitative of success. Similarly, Brown (2008) and Oke et al. (2013) both indicated that having a strong, positive relationship between foster parents and the agency was a factor that foster parents perceived to be important in facilitating a successful placement.

## Beyond Successful Placements: Aging Out

In cases where foster children do not find a 'forever home' or return to their biological families, sometimes the end of a successful placement comes when a child reaches the age where they are no longer under the protection of social services, referred to as aging out.[4] In Saskatchewan, this is age 18. At this point, foster parents are no longer responsible for the well-being of that child according to social services.

Because of the impact that successful placements can have on the long-term well-being of foster children, parents in the current study were asked what they believed the role of foster parents to be once children were no longer their responsibility according to social services.

Throughout the interviews, the overwhelming consensus was that the decision to continue supporting foster children who age out, be it financially or emotionally, is entirely dependent on the situation. All of the foster parents interviewed expressed that this decision would vary based on factors such as how long the child was with the family and the nature of the relationship. Though none of the children Emily and her spouse have cared for have turned 18, she indicated that their support would be continuous:

> For me, I think it's our responsibility. We made a commitment to these kids, to have, to
> see their lives through... for us in our foster home, if you are here and you turn 18 and
> you are still living with us, then you're still living with us, or you're still part of our family.

Emily did note that this would likely not be her opinion for children who lived with the family when they were younger, and then left to go to subsequent placements, but children who "grew up" in their family would continue to be supported. She also expressed the belief that those foster parents who choose to not continue supporting children after they have left the system should not feel guilty for that decision, whatever the reasons for it. Though Emily believes that this aspect of the system needs to be re-examined, as it stands now, foster parents are no longer required to provide care for children once they turn 18. Annie and Roger, who have seen many of their foster children age out of the system, similarly expressed that

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[4] This age varies across provinces. In Saskatchewan, a youth is no longer under protection of the Ministry at age 18, though the youth can continue to receive financial support until age 21 if they are continuing their education (Ministry of Social Services, 2019). Many other provinces also provide financial supports for youth up to age 21 (Child and Family Services, 2017; Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services, n.d.), or up to age 26 if they are attending educational programs (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2019).

they try to continue supporting them, but indicated that it always depends on the circumstances:

> It's pretty tough, because you're right, the department says you don't have to worry about them anymore. But at the same time, they're going down a little different trail saying, "well those kids still need you." As far as we're concerned, we try and leave it open, for kids to phone us if they want or whatever. But it's hard because, part of that, okay our biological kids, they need money for this, for that, whatever. Which is just the way it is. Some of these foster children, well, all of them, they're no different. You know, they, something comes up and they're short money. What do you do? And that's a hard, hard thing to decide. In some instances we give them money and sometimes we don't, but it's, it's truly out of our pocket, so it makes it hard. We try and have the phone, you know have the kids to know that we are there. Like yesterday we had a girl, we phoned her, she was here for a couple of years and she's 26 now, but it's her birthday, so we phoned her and just talked to her a few minutes, and that kind of thing.

Financial support, for Annie and Roger, is more difficult to provide for foster children who have aged out, particularly because they have had a large number of foster children who have turned eighteen while in their care. Regardless, they are always open to providing emotional support to those who were placed with them, and also indicated that they are the grandparents to some of their foster kids' children, who come and stay with them regularly.

All of the survey responses echoed the belief that emotional support, and sometimes financial support, should still be provided for foster children after they are no longer in the system. Opinions on whether a child should continue living with the family had some variation: one respondent indicated that foster parents should help their foster children find a suitable independent living program, while another respondent said that children should be able to stay with the family as long as needed. As reflected in the responses from Emily, Annie, and Roger, the decisions on what should happen after children age out of care is likely to vary based on the circumstances of each family and each child, which could affect the ability of foster children to feel security in their placements if they are unsure about what the outcome will be once they turn 18. The most salient belief among all the responses was that foster parents should continue to provide, at minimum, emotional support for children who are no longer under the care of social services.

The perception that support from foster parents is important to youth after leaving care is consistent with research that has found better outcomes for those that have positive relationships with stable adults during their transition out of care (Reid, 2007; Rutman et al., 2007). However, maintaining supportive relationships with adults is only one aspect of the many factors necessary for the success of a young person aging out of care (Courtney et al., 2001; Reid, 2007). While the benefits that often come from successful placements while in care may set youth on a promising path for when they leave care, there are many additional components that are required for youth to continue to lead successful lives.

The many difficulties that face individuals who age out of care are getting increasing research attention (Rutman et al., 2007), as well as attention in news media. There has been particular

focus given to these youth in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, as many provinces have temporarily extended care past the age where youth would normally age out (May, 2020; Skjerven, 2020; Ward, 2020; Zussman, 2020). Though the circumstances surrounding the pandemic are particularly troublesome, youth aging out of care face many of the same challenges under the best of circumstances and deserve more attention. Investigating factors that will assist youth who age out of the system successfully transition into adulthood in the long-term is still necessary.

## Limitations and Future Research

A limitation of this study was that the use of a survey did not allow for follow-up questions or clarification on responses from those participants. Future research should aim to include more interview-based discussions with foster parents in order to get a more in-depth picture of their perspectives.

Additionally, the themes in the current study were created mainly through the perspectives of three foster parents in two foster homes, both based in Saskatchewan. Though support for these themes was found in survey responses from seven foster parents across three provinces, as well as in existing literature, further research into the prevalence of these themes in different provinces and with different demographics of foster parents is necessary. Further, prospective studies of the presence of these themes in foster homes and placement outcomes would be a valuable direction for future research.

As previously noted, future research should look at aspects associated with the child welfare system, apart from the maintenance of relationships with foster families, that may aid youth when they begin to transition out of care and into adulthood

## Conclusion

In order to adequately achieve the goals of foster care, individual placements in care need to be successful. As individuals who have direct interactions with foster children, foster parents have unique insight into aspects of a placement that may indicate success. Through analysis of interviews and survey responses from foster parents, this study determined that security, adaptability, a family environment, and communication are crucial in ensuring that a foster child experiences success in a placement. These themes reflect factors that were also apparent in previous research, indicating that future research may be able to implement these factors as a means to predict placement success.

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# In Their Own Words: A Thematic Analysis of the 'New Members Introduce Yourselves' Sub-forum on Stormfront

## Noelle Warkentin

**Abstract.** Right wing extremism is a current threat within Canada, the United States and abroad. While there has been extensive research undertaken to provide information related to Islamic terrorism, research on terrorism caused by the right-wing movement has only recently begun (Scrivens & Perry, 2017). Although studies have investigated the reasons why people join these extremist movements, the question this study aims to answer is what the tipping point was that ultimately resulted in joining. Toward this end, I conducted a thematic analysis on the popular right-wing extremist forum Stormfront (stormfront.org). After extracting posts from the forum, content was analysed using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. Overall, three main themes emerged from the codes in this analysis: Fear, white superiority, and influence.

## Introduction

Right wing extremism (RWE) is a current threat within Canada, the United States and abroad. The movement has been involved with numerous terrorist attacks, and shows little sign of slowing down (Beirich & Potok, 2009). While there has been extensive research undertaken to provide information related to Islamic terrorism, research on terrorism caused by the right-wing movement has begun only recently (Scrivens & Perry, 2017). The right-wing movement involves individuals coming together, both in person and through online social platforms to not only discuss, but to spread their rhetoric. The propaganda spread by this group is oriented towards exploiting the emotions of others, in an attempt to recruit them to join their movement (Stevkovski, 2015). Technological developments have given RWE the ability to spread these messages of recruitment ever more broadly, allowing the dissolution of borders that previously constrained recruitment.

Previous studies have found that there are common factors in why people join right-wing movements. However, the question remains whether there are certain tipping points that finally push people into joining the movement. What are the specific reasons these individuals give for wanting to become a member of the right-wing movement? This question has been the driving force behind this research project. The current study involved a thematic analysis on the sub-forum 'New Members Introduce Yourselves' of the popular right-wing extremist forum

Stormfront.[1] As I took an inductive approach in this analysis, the final themes that emerged from the data were created out of what was found in the data, rather than on searching for specific answers or guided by any particular theoretical approach.

## Who are Right-Wing Extremists?

Rooted in an ideology of racism and nationalism, right-wing extremists feel threatened by non-Whites, Jews, feminists, and the LGBTQ community (Perry & Scrivens, 2018; Stevkovski, 2015). Right-wing extremists see themselves as a group fighting for their rights, and specifically fighting against 'others' who they believe are culpable for the decline of society (Stevkovski, 2015). They believe that these 'others' include all other ethnicities, and that it is up to the White race to band together to maintain their purity (Stevkovski, 2015). Violence is pervasive in these extremist movements, targeting minorities whom they perceive as the enemy (Blee, 2010). It is no wonder then that the rise of this movement has brought with it an increase in crime and violence against minorities (Blum, 2018). Vohryzek-Boden (2003) states that this situation is unfortunately far from over, and that right-wing extremists will be responsible for more terrorist threats in the coming future. For these reasons, it is imperative that steps are put in place to prevent the continuing rise of this movement, and the ensuing violent acts.

## The Rise of Right-Wing Extremism

The presence of the right-wing extremist movement is nothing new. Scrivens and Perry (2017) discuss how this ideological movement has indeed been part of Canada's history for decades. The 1920's witnessed the introduction of the Klu Klux Klan in our country, as they laid their roots here for the first time (Perry & Scrivens, 2016). Not long after, during the 1940's – 1960's, Canada's population of right-wing extremists grew exponentially (Perry & Scrivens, 2016). Right-wing extremism is nothing new in the United States either. Vohryzek-Bolden (2003) stipulates how the movement persists within America, and has been a part of that country since colonial times. However, the right-wing movement has changed through the years, and is no longer like movements of the past (Beirich & Potpok, 2009). The mid 1990's witnessed an increase in right-wing extremism in America, with the movement ballooning following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 (Beirich & Potok, 2009). It seems things have not changed much in the years since, as the growth of the right-wing movement doesn't seem to be slowing down any time soon (Beirich & Potok, 2009). This movement is not only unique to North America, right-wing extremism exists in Europe, with Stevkovski (2015) observing that this movement is on the rise within the European Union (EU).

## Why Are People Joining the Right-Wing Movement?

Understanding the very depth of this movement, and how it transcends generations, building momentum in the countries where its ideology spreads seemingly unthwarted, we must understand the common theme among why people decide to join. The historical context in which this movement has collected momentum, and the similarities between countries during these times, can help us unravel the root of this movement. Fortunately, these are things that

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[1] https://www.stormfront.org/forum/

researchers have already mapped out. For instance, there was a rise in Canadians joining this movement when Canada was undergoing major changes to its immigration laws, inflation was skyrocketing, and unemployment rates were increasing (Perry & Scrivens, 2016). In the European Union, the number of right-wing extremists rose when living standards started to fall due to an increase in unemployment, poverty and corruption (Stevkovski, 2015). The United States is no different; the movement not only persists, but grows with the rise of the multicultural society and an increase in globalization, with nationalism and xenophobia further exacerbated by the shock of 9/11 (Beirich & Potok, 2009). When combined with other social changes and economic pressures that seemingly weigh down on white middle class workers, motivation for the rise of the right-wing movement increases (Beirich & Potok, 2009).

The combination of these factors is theorized to be the perfect breeding ground for a movement to take place. Anxiety and frustration at an all-time high leaves people yearning for change, and looking for a scapegoat on whom they can lay the blame (Perry & Scrivens, 2016). When living standards started to fall due to an increase in unemployment in the EU, poverty, corruption and fear of the state of the future combined to strengthen the extremist right wing movement (Stevkovski, 2015). Eatwell (1997) states that this growth of the extremist movement is not only evident in European countries, but in countries the world over. These circumstances are a large determinant in the steady incline in right-wing extremism, however, the age of the internet has also played its role in the increase of right-wing members. This rise in extremism throughout differing countries may all be connected to the advancements and availability of technology (Holt, Freilich & Chermak, 2017). Through the use of online social platforms, extremist media is but a click away, meaning that the more time an individual spends online, the higher their likelihood of encountering such propaganda, enculturating them into the right-wing movement (Holt at al., 2017).

## The Current Study

The aim of the current study was to employ a thematic analysis on data collected from the forum Stormfront, in order to comprehend the driving force that has propelled these individuals into the right-wing movement. As there are so many factors responsible for sending individuals down this path, I wanted to uncover if there were any specific circumstances that gave the last push towards membership; I wanted to understand what they claim to be the turning point for them, in their own words.

## Methods

As SFU's policy R20.01 states that publicly available data is exempt from review, and since Stormfront is publicly available, the project began without formal review.

A thematic analysis was employed in this study, using a random sampling of posts found on the forum Stormfront. Stormfront is one of the more popular right-wing extremist online open chat forums (Perry & Scrivens, 2018). Upon typing in the website address, you're taken to a noticeably detailed and organized site; clearly there has been thought put into its creation and maintenance. This time and attention to detail extends to every corner of the site, from the

blue background, to the picture of the Parthenon at the very top of the page. Upfront there is a quick introduction of what Stormfront represents, stating their welcome message in a seemingly unassuming representation of who they are. A small message in the top right corner reads "every month is White history month" (stormfront.org/forum/). The site offers a multitude of forums ranging from posting guidelines, politics, introductions, as well as international forums, for members joining from countries around the world. The site hosts a rather large number of people from around the world; with a total of 349,590 members, and over 13,000,000 posts, the site offered a decent amount of posts that could be used in the analysis of this study.

An inductive thematic approach allows for patterns to be found within the dataset, and doesn't constrain the results to fit into any pre-existing framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method allowed me to fully explore any detail that may arise from my dataset, without having to rely on what was already known. In this way, I had the potential to find information that could be missed had I followed a specific framework.

The study's inductive approach required that I read every comment in my dataset before the process of coding could begin. As this is more of a bottom up approach, reading the content prior to creating codes allowed me to create codes derived from the content. With an aim of understanding the specific influences that projected individuals onto the path of the right-wing movement, data needed to come from a multitude of individual's who share their experiences in a non-judgemental environment. Given the tendency for  technology to act as a barrier between people and the real world, allowing them to feel anonymous without the fear of judgement (Holt et al., 2017), posts taken from an online source have a good chance of being credible. Given that Stormfront is one of the largest and well-known right-wing extremist forums, it seemed that this data source would yield sufficient information. Data capturing proceeded with the use of the Dark Crawler.[2] The technology used in the Dark Crawler allows for the extraction of information, including text, from websites like Stormfront (Scrivens, Davies, Frank & Mei, 2015).

## Identifying Keywords

Data was gathered from the popular right-wing extremist chat forum, Stormfront. Using the Dark Crawler, posts were extracted from the site which matched specific criteria. An initial investigation into search terms that would uncover the greatest number of relevant posts revealed that there would be no one great search term to find every meaningful post. In this preliminary search, terms used included: 'Joined,' 'why,' and 'here.' Unfortunately, these terms yielded uninspiring results. Scouring the forum for search terms that may be used to identify the posts needed for this project to begin, I came to the realization that although people may be discussing the reasons that brought them to the movement, there is no one way people introduce this topic. As different as each person is, so too are the stories they tell, meaning that there could hardly be one word that would reveal to me every post on this particular subject. After the initial trial and error of search terms, I realized that often, when people are giving

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answers to things that they have done, they will use the term 'because.' Although this could not bring about every post on the subject of interest, it did help me identify a sufficient number of posts. To be honest, it is unlikely that if I had every post on this subject that I would have the time to read and code them all in the timeframe given for this project. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the goal was to collect, code, and analyze as many as I could. Collecting the posts that came up gave me the opportunity to narrow them down further through random sampling.

## Data Capture

Once it was established that the best search term was 'because,' the process of data capturing began. The steps taken to find the necessary posts began by selecting the 'New Members Introduce Yourselves' forum, and searching 'because' in the search bar. This revealed a further set of sub-forums, including 6 versions of the sub-forum 'New Members from Around the World stop in and say Hello' (with the additional label of part 1 – 6 accordingly). Altogether, these sub-forums contained 9,498 posts, inclusive of comments, published between 2005 and 2019. Starting within part 1 of these sub-forums, the search term 'because' was entered into the search bar again, in an attempt to narrow down the posts to ones that only contained the word 'because.' This was the repeated in parts 2 – 6.

Overall, 9,354 posts were extracted from the sub-forums using the Dark Crawler. Not all captured posts were original, as some of these posts were comments attached to original posts. Comments on posts were all retained for the potential that the posters of these comments may add to the posts themselves, expressing their own reasons for joining. Extracted posts were then exported to Excel, and reading of the posts began. After reading 300 posts, it was obvious that most of the posts did not contain the reasons for joining, and not all posts contained the key word 'because.' With this in mind, I endeavored again to narrow down the posts so as to only have posts which contained 'because.' A search query was entered into the dataset on excel to find every post that actually contained the specific term. Once all posts containing the term 'because' were found, they were moved to the top of the document, with the leftover posts sorted together at the bottom of the spreadsheet. The posts that did not contain 'because' were then wiped from the document, leaving altogether 877 posts. From these 877, a random number generator was applied to each post which were then organized in ascending order based on the random number they were assigned. From this, the first 400 of these posts, which included corresponding comments, were imported into NVivo. Screen name information, and any other possibly identifying information was not used in this analysis.

## What About Bias?

Qualitative researchers are often tasked with exploring the deep underpinnings of what or who it is they are studying, frequently delving deep into the lives of those being researched. Unbeknownst to the researcher, there may be some biases that try to snake their way into this research, distorting the quality and impartiality that is required of research. It is then a task at hand for any qualitative researcher to first acknowledge any biases they have as they enter the

world they are about to explore. Reflection is necessary, and the researcher should ensure they are employing reflexivity during the research process.

To this end, during the course of this study I have taken the time to reflect on any biases that I hold towards the group being studied. As such, it is in the best interest of this project that I acknowledge the biases that I hold towards extremist groups. It must be understood that the hateful rhetoric of this extremist movement is something that I do not agree with. However, I do take the stance that prevention is the most important tool we have, and so in order to fully comprehend why these individuals join these movements, it is necessary to view their reasons as objectively as possible. With this frame of mind, I took my time reading posts, and creating codes based solely on what was being said. I avoided creating emotionally worded codes that could potentially alter how I interpret subsequent posts, and left gaps between my coding process, so as not to become too emotionally invested. Throughout the coding process, I viewed each post as a question of how the individual must have gotten to this point, where they have decided to join a movement, instead of reading from a place of judgement. Coding was done thoughtfully and I remained aware of my biases, approaching the project with a recourse to help build upon the discussion of prevention.

## Data Analysis

Data was first imported into the software program NVivo in order to facilitate the coding process. As the aim of the study was to understand the motivations behind what lead individuals towards this extremist movement, posts were coded if they alluded to why they became involved in the movement. As codes were created inductively, there were no predetermined codes to fill. In other words, going in to this study I did not have a list of requirements that must be met in order for a post to be coded. With my research question at the top of my mind, I created codes that encompassed any reason found in the data that would explain the commenter's motive for joining. The inductive approach allowed for me to develop codes along the way, as they appeared naturally within the published text. By following this method, I was not constrained by what prior research has found. Rather I was open and reflexive to read, in their own words, why these members of the right-wing movement had joined, creating codes that fit with their reasons, instead of trying to find their reasons that could fit into a code.

Overall, there were 199 posts from the original random sample of 400 that provided any information pertaining to a reason for joining the movement. Through this initial coding development, 17 codes had been created, each one produced inductively by a thorough analysis of the dataset. Once coding had concluded, the content within each code was re-analyzed to ensure content and code accuracy. Through this recoding process, it was discovered that two of the more specific codes fit more appropriately within more general codes of similar meaning. In the end, after the entire inductive coding and recoding procedure, a total of 15 unique codes had been created, each one encapsulating the different motivations of those who had joined the right-wing extremist movement.

Once confident that codes and the information contained within them was accurate, codes were further aggregated based on similarities. Being an inductive process, there were no predefined categories, rather categories were created based on similarities between the codes. This process allowed me to find the larger picture within the coded schemes, and identify a total of 6 broader categories or meta-codes. There were two codes that had been identified as not belonging to any specific category, so instead of trying to force them to fit into any of the categories, they remained single codes. The remaining 6 categories contained between two to three codes.

## Results

As can be seen in Table 1, three major themes emerged from the data. Each theme identified the commonalities between specific categories, bridging them into a single body, and representing the meaning behind the codes. As Braun and Clarke (2008) note, themes are an important aspect of the research project, as they represent patterns among the data. And in the case of this project, these themes each hold the collective of the coded words, encompassing true stories of why a select few have become involved in the right-wing movement.

**Table 1.** Breakdown of Themes, Categories and Codes

| Fear | White Superiority | Influence |
|---|---|---|
| **Non-Whites are Dangerous** | **Non-Whites are Lesser Than** | **External Triggers**<br>• Because of Things Read/ Watched<br>• Political Environment |
| **White Race Declining**<br>• Non-Whites Taking Over/ Pushing out Whites<br>• White Race is Threatened/ White Genocide | **White Pride**<br>• Proud to be White - But Not Racist<br>• Whites Need to Unify | **Relational Motives**<br>• Introduced by Family/ Friends<br>• Raised with These Beliefs |
| **Loss of Rights**<br>• Non-Whites Have More Rights<br>• Discrimination Against Whites | **Dislike of Multiculturalism**<br>• Multiculturalism is Forced onto Whites<br>• Dislike of Immigration Influx<br>• Think Races Should be Separate | |

## Fear

The largest among these themes, making up 50% of the dataset (n=100) is 'Fear.' Although this theme accounted for the largest portion of codes, it is not meant to imply that this is the most

important theme. Braun and Clarke (2009) caution that the size of the theme does not indicate importance, but rather simply prevalence. As evidenced by their posts, it seemed as though the main driving force behind joining this movement was a motivation based on dread, anxiety, and panic. These individuals believe that their culture and way of life is being threatened, it's under attack. This fear was the driving force which led them towards the right-wing movement.

Individuals posted about their disdain for the ethnicities that are taking over 'White countries' and pushing out the White race. This trepidation was evident in the language posted by these individuals, as posters spoke on how they were losing their jobs, their way of life, their culture. Many of these individuals claimed that this was a time in which they 'woke up' and finally could see the truth of what was happening to their country, driving them to join the ranks of the right-wing movement:

> X1[3]: for me, it sunk in over time...gradually...I began waking up to reality?[sic]I also realized.... what a stupid idiot i've been.... and then I started thinking..[*sic*] this is really happening, and the world is changing... and minorities (non-whites) are trying to consume our great Country [*sic*] you find many of them in employment positions... trying to be white [*sic*] trying to fit in? also...by way, trying to take over ....and it is happening... and they are helping each other get those jobs...favoritism for non-whites....and discrimination against the white population......this is good???

This same dread is echoed in posts by those who feel as though the White race is being reduced, that their entire race will soon be gone. They joined because they think that this race war was brought about by minorities who are intent on creating a White genocide. Joining the movement was a way to band together, to stop the genocide; they joined because in their minds, the future for the White race depends upon it.

> X2: lately my town has been becoming infested with minorities and I joined here looking to find people like me who live locally or know people who are local to me, this is because we, as a white race need to stick together to win this race war.

> X3: I'm here because I believe that there is a genocide going on right now.

This thinking bleeds into the same thought process that if nothing is done, non-Whites eventually take over and bend the political system to their needs. These individuals feel as though the system is rigged to favour minorities at the expense of Whites, and that Whites need to stand together against this practice, to take back what they believe is rightfully theirs, and so they joined:

> X4: I want to join because for the last 20 years we have been invaded by waves of illegal immigrants that know how to rally together and manipulate the US system to benefit their imported race and culture at the expense of ours. I am against the illegal immigrants that come to our homeland and protest against our government with impunity for rights that are not granted them under our current constitution and laws.

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[3] Quotes were taken directly from the data, and assigned code names (X1-X20) for the purpose of this analysis.

A large proportion of individuals who were motivated to join this movement did so because of their perception that Whites are currently being discriminated against. This perception of victimization created the drive for them to seek out a community of people they could relate with, people that would not discriminate against them because they are the same. This perception of discrimination was thought to be infringing on their rights, and in order to protect these rights, they feel they must join this movement:

> X5: I joined up because I'm really sick and tired of the double standard of how it's ok to have black pride or any other kind of pride but white pride is severely frowned upon. It's almost getting to the point where the very word white itself is going to become illegal to say.

> X6: I finally was pushed to join the colors after being disturbed by all the anti-white-male-Christian rhetoric of the social engineers that pervade our nation. I'm here because I am deeply proud of my white Christian heritage.

Other posters in this theme joined because they believe that non-Whites are dangerous, and must be stopped. These people became members as they believe that minorities are a menace who will not conform, and that their presence will ultimately threaten their way of life.

> X7: I join this community because i hate cultural invaders, i hate people that can not addapt,[*sic*] i hate the etnic [*sic*] groups that make civillians [*sic*] feel foreingers [*sic*] in their own country and make them feel scared on there own[*sic*] streets.

## White Superiority

Even though this theme accounted for the smallest percentage of posts at 26% (n=51), the percentage of codes within this theme does not equal a lack of significance. White superiority is composed of those posters who stated they joined the movement because of their dislike of cultural mixing. These individuals seemed to have preconceived notions about other minorities, and this disdain eventually built up enough to prompt them to become involved in the movement. The overall premise behind this theme is that White pride should be acknowledged and supported, rather than what they feel as disparaged and deemed 'racist.' The posters grouped under this theme differ from the those in the 'fear' theme as they do not mention signs of a race war, or the danger of non-Whites, but rather emphasize wanting to connect with other Whites. The most prominent component in this theme is that these individuals have joined the movement to show pride for their race. In fact, some posters explicitly stated that they were not racist, but simply wanted to find a place where they could express the pride they feel for being White. They contend that since other cultures are able to show pride for their race, that Whites should get the same respect for theirs. Some have experienced direct insults from others when they tried to show their pride in being White, and these experiences were what encouraged them to join the right-wing movement:

> X8: When society discriminated against certain white people, where's our justice? I want a place where I can embrace my European heritage and being from the South. I'm proud to be white, etc; where I came from. And I'm not ashamed to say what I think.

X9: But overall I joined because I am proud to be a white boy and I want to support my own. If everybody else in the world can be proud and support their own why cant I (we)?

Others posted that they had joined the movement as they felt it is important for the White race to unify, and to stand together in support. However, it is not a far stretch to state that the unity they search for seems to be out of a need to stand not just for their own race, but specifically against other races:

X10: I want to get into pro White and white nationalist movements because I'm looking for something worth fighting and dying for. I want to leave some kind of legacy behind and I want to fight for a better tomorrow, make some kind of difference and make the world a better place and most importantly I want to make something of my life I'm proud of.

Multiculturalism was found to be a large driving force behind why some had decided to join the movement. The belief that multiculturalism is being forced upon them, and the need to search for people in their own race, as they are surrounded by non-Whites, was mentioned throughout the posts.

X11: I joined because I am getting tired of the mutlracial [*sic*] garbage that is being shoved down our throats.

X12: I came here because I wanted to be with like-minded people who see that this forced integration idea doesn't work anymore and is leading to more problems now than ever before

The influx in immigration had spurred on some to join the movement; as immigration increased, so too did the members in this right-wing movement.

X13: I would like to say that I joined this site because I am sick of seeing my European homelands invaded and destroyed by non-whites.

Others joined the site simply because they feel that the races should be kept separate. They do not believe in mixing of the races and have stated that their joining the movement is a stance against that, and an attempt to preserve the purity of their race:

X14: I recently awakened to the fact that races [*sic*] matter. I do [*sic*] see myself as a blind racist who gives people heat [*sic*] because of their color. I will always judge people by their actions first, and by their features second. However, this is not to say that race does not matter to me. If anything I see myself as a biological racist since I am mostly concerned with, the problem of cross-breeding, and the the [*sic*] preservation of the Aryan race.

Still others have claimed that they do not like the direction their country is going, and that minorities are to blame for this. Using derogatory language, they express how they feel about

minorities, and that they joined the movement to be part of a collective fight against what they think is happening:

> X15: After seeing what is happening in London, it changed me. The Muslim scum have absolutely destroyed a once great country in a matter of a few years, and they hate all that is white, western, christian, and good. [sic]  Im starting to see the same trend here, so I hope we adapt, and fight off those sub humans.

## Influence

The last theme that emerged consists of those who have joined the movement purely out of social influence from other people and other sources of information in their lives. This theme accounts for 24% of the codes (n=48), and was categorized as those who joined due to external triggers, and those who joined due to relational influences. I find this theme to be an interesting one, as it illustrates how propaganda can work, and how important one's social surroundings can be.

Those who were influenced to join the movement for these reasons differ from those in the other two themes in that they may not have experienced anything that has changed their views, but rather they have come to this movement because of other people, or things they may have watched or read.  In some instances, these individuals had joined the movement because they were taught right-wing ideology growing up. Whichever way they arrived to this movement, they did so out of influence. With the rise in technology, the internet has made sharing information extremely accessible, so it is not a surprise that a number of individuals have found the movement because of the things they have either watched or read:

> X16: decided to join after reading an article by DR. Duke. For [*sic*] long I have suppressed those thoughts and feelings associated with the mud's surrounding me.

> X17: recently re-awakened after reading (of all things) [*sic*] Whatever Happened to the Class of 1965? [*sic*] which features a chapter on Jamie Kelso.

Political environment was also a means to joining this movement. Either through a political ideal that they agreed with, or because of a political ideal they disliked, there was some political aspect to why some posters had joined the movement:

> X18: I've been following the alt-right for a few months, and their message resonates with me more and more, day by day, especially with what is happening in the world politically, and how it's getting worse for Europeans everywhere.

Another common influence often came in the form of family or friends. For some posters, it was this experience that brought them to the movement, either an interest in learning more, or a complete indoctrination after having been consuming the information second hand for a while, these individuals were compelled to join:

> X19: finally decided to join because everything around me just sickens me to the point where I feel like my head could explode.  I can no longer tolerate the ignorance and

hypocrisy of most people that I come in contact with, with the exception of my husband who has been teaching me the truth for years.

The last group of people who have fallen under this theme are those who have actually been raised with these values. These individuals stated how they had been raised with these ideologies, and had taken these beliefs on as their own, leading to their eventual membership in the right-wing movement:

X20: Growing up, my father always had a seemingly unjustified dislike for anyone other than white people. I was obviously influenced by him, and even when I got old enough to make up my own mind, I understood where he was coming from when we finally sat down and had an in-depth conversation.

## Discussion

Whether motivated by fear, influence, or from the standpoint of superiority, many of the posters in this study discussed having decided to join this movement after an accumulation of events or experiences. Some professed that there came a day when they 'woke up' to what was going on around them, and that this fear of what was happening was what prompted them to join the movement. Others established that they believed the White race to be superior, and that they had finally come to the point where they wanted to reach out to other like-minded individuals. And still some had been brought to the movement by someone they knew, or some message they had read or watched, which convinced them that they should join this movement. Though there were different experiences that brought the individuals in this sample to this movement, there was found to be a common thread among them. This commonality was finding a place to meet others like them, a "Whites Only" place where they could talk about race. What was clear from reading their messages, was that each individual had a number of similar experiences, or deep-rooted feelings which eventually led them towards the movement. I had endeavoured to discover the specific turning point in one's life that gave the final push towards joining; what I found was that these turning points were not any single event, rather they were an accumulation of similar events that eventually inspired them to want to join the movement. As this study employed an inductive process, steering clear from an attempt to fit posts into prearranged ideas of why people join this movement, I was able to code based on what was being expressed through the posts. Even so, the themes found in this analysis seem to line up with what previous research has found on the subject.

The theme of fear encompassed those who were struggling with the economic pressures brought on by society. Individuals in this sample expressed fear that, due to multiculturalism and immigration, they were losing their jobs, and the White race was being extinguished. This follows findings from  previous research that focuses on the anxiety felt by these social circumstances, where individuals are looking for a place to put the blame, and for a place where they can go to change the situation (Perry & Scrivens, 2016).

Individuals in the sample who fell under the theme of White superiority, believe that the races are not equal, and that the White race is superior. They spoke about joining the movement to

protect their race and to meet with others who share their values. The majority of these individuals did not discuss the circumstances surrounding why they believed the races should be separate, or why they believed the White race was superior. Since it has already been established that right-wing extremists believe their race to be superior, and express that they need to keep the purity of their race, it seems logical that these individuals would seek out such a movement. Some of the posters in this group however, did mention their dislike for multiculturalism. This aligns with the findings that as multiculturalism grows, so too does the right-wing movement (Beirich & Potok, 2009).

Influence was a broad theme, encompassing individuals who had joined because they had read something that changed their views, or had been raised their entire lives with these ideologies. As with the theme of fear, this theme fits in with what previous research has indicated as a driving factor towards the movement. Gabriel & Keller (2014) stipulate how the family environment plays a large role in determining racist ideals. So, it is conceivable why these individuals have joined the right-wing movement. Additionally, the growth of technology and the easy access to information that this implies lends itself well to the idea that more and more people are reading things or watching things that convert them to this ideology.

Overall, the findings from this study help to extend current understandings of why people join the extreme right movement. Some may join because of something they've read, while others state that there were multiple instances, whether real or perceived, of negative experiences that finally drove them to join. One commonality that underlined every theme was the need to express either their new found, or gradually found, belief with other like-minded individuals.

## Limitations and Future Research

One limitation from this study is that the only forum used was Stormfront. Although this forum was chosen specifically for its popularity, it would be interesting to investigate this topic further using right-wing forums that may not be as well known. Since the current study only coded 400 posts, and from those 400 only 199 posts provided useful information, it's possible that a larger dataset may add to the breadth of the current themes. Future research may want to add another layer to this study; it would be interesting to see if there is a correlation between the themes of why people join this movement, and their posting behaviour. Are certain motivations for joining related to higher or lower posting behaviour? Perhaps this could help identify which motivations lead to the most committed members.

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# Right Wing Extremism in a Video Game Community? A Qualitative Content Analysis Exploring the Discourse of the Reddit GamerGate Community r/KotakuInAction

## Ashley Peckford

**Abstract**. This exploratory study into the connection between right wing extremism (RWE) and the Reddit GamerGate community r/KotakuInAction employed a qualitative content analysis design to compare discourse within the community to known literature on RWE. Ten discussion threads including 2720 comments were analysed, resulting in three overarching themes: "RWE bigotry," "always anti-left," and "hate speech is free speech." This study found evidence of a connection between GamerGate and RWE, suggesting that the nature of this Reddit community does foster extremist beliefs.

## Introduction

Right wing extremism (RWE) and the video gaming community are connected by the online harassment campaign known as GamerGate, which began in 2014 and evolved into a community of Trump supporters within the first two years of its existence (Lees, 2016). Researchers interested in this online community soon pointed out that because of the similarities between the groups, this connection should have been predicted from the beginning (Bezio, 2018; Winter, 2019). Despite this connection between GamerGate and RWE having been made, no literature has appeared exploring this connection in great detail. My research interest in the GamerGate community is personal: as a woman who enjoys playing video games, I was frequently exposed to the discourse within the community, as well as the aftermath of how the harassment campaign affected those it targeted.

My objective was exploratory. I wanted to examine the discourse of the GamerGate community in detail. I believe it is important to explore this community in a qualitative manner in order to delve into the underlying meanings behind what is being said and to determine whether overlap exists between the GamerGate subreddit and the right wing extremist community. The current study employed a qualitative content analysis design influenced by aspects of netnography (Costello et al., 2017). While the study itself focused on archived data, it was intended to be a closer look into a specific virtual community: what it talked about, what it believed, and what interactions were happening among the users.

The current study found evidence of RWE discourse within the Reddit GamerGate community. By qualitatively examining ten discussion threads from the GamerGate community on Reddit, I was able to develop three overarching themes that framed this community's discourse: "RWE bigotry," "always anti-left," and "hate speech is free speech." This study was able to show that GamerGate communities mirror the discourse of RWE communities and provided evidence that GamerGate either was indeed a precursor of the rise of the alt-right online, or it attracted right wing extremists to the extent that it changed the structure of the community to the point that it is now a RWE community. This has implication for future research into the way RWE presents or inserts itself into interest-based or hobby-based communities such as the video gaming community. It shows how the phenomenon of RWE is not limited to the communities outright labeled as being a home for extremist beliefs. In addition, understanding how extremist beliefs integrate into the more mundane areas of the internet is an essential step in preventing the spread of such beliefs.

## Literature Review

### What is GamerGate?

The main focus of this study is the community known as "GamerGate." In order to understand what this community is all about, it is important to go back to the beginning of the controversy. GamerGate began in 2014 as a response to an allegation of poor journalist ethics in the gaming community. A game designer named Zoe Quinn was accused by her ex-boyfriend of sleeping with journalists in exchange for a positive review of the game she had recently released (Todd, 2015). The accusation was proven false, but it still sparked a targeted harassment campaign against Quinn and many other people in the gaming community who defended her against the harassment or called the gaming community out for its hostile actions (Todd, 2015). Initially focused on accusing Quinn of exchanging sex for positive reviews, the campaign quickly evolved to target feminist discourse within the gaming community with death threats, bomb threats, and the release of her personal information online known as "doxing" (Heron et al., 2014). The majority of the harassment occurred online in social media spaces like Twitter, Reddit, and Tumblr. GamerGate was not focused on any specific game in particular; rather, it was concerned with gaming as a whole, and the "gamer" identity itself. The stereotypical "gamer" subculture is often associated with cyberbullying and bigotry (Ballard & Welch, 2017), and the GamerGate campaign reflected this. Misogyny, racism, homophobia, and transphobia were among the types of hate speech flung around by the GamerGate crowd, despite an insistence that the focus of the campaign was to call out ethical issues in games journalism (Todd, 2015).

Eventually, the campaign faded from its online spotlight, yet the GamerGate community itself survived. During the 2016 US election, the website Breitbart—which before had posted numerous pro-GamerGate articles and gained supporters directly from the GamerGate community—was now filling the GamerGate community's newsfeeds with pro-Trump and right wing extremist articles (Bezio, 2018; Lees, 2016). GamerGate was being usurped by the alt-right as "their" issue: GamerGate supporters, initially angry about the presence of progressive values in the gaming community, were being fed real world political issues to direct their hostility towards (Lees, 2016). These GamerGate supporters were mostly young white men who felt as

though their identity as a gamer was being taken away by minorities, a sentiment that mirrored right wing extremism (Massanari, 2018).

The GamerGate community as it currently stands did not begin as a site for right wing extremists to discuss politics; it began as a gaming site and evolved from there. The reason for this connection, however, has only been theorized; never formally tested. Finding out why this happened requires a deep dive into the community itself. Pro-GamerGate websites such as the subreddit KotakuInAction (reddit.com/r/KotakuInAction)—named after the games journalism site Kotaku that posted the positive review of Quinn's game—still exist online, and its users are still active in large numbers. If a connection between GamerGate and RWE does in fact exist, the evidence of that connection would be found in these active communities.

## RWE and Hate Speech Online

Opinions expressed by GamerGate supporters, as shown in previous literature, often mirror those of right wing extremists; namely, the "us versus them" mentality of feeling disenfranchised, as well as the opinion that their community largely made up of white men had been "invaded" by women and people of colour (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016; Bezio, 2018). According to previous research, hostility towards others is not exclusively a GamerGate problem and is actually a common sentiment in the gaming community as a whole (Ballard & Welch, 2017).

Identifying online right wing extremist communities is an essential part of researching RWE (Perry & Scrivens, 2016), and because this study aimed to compare the discourse of right wing extremists and the discourse of the GamerGate community, it is necessary to have a working definition of right wing extremism. The purpose of the current study is to examine if there is a connection between GamerGate and right wing extremism by looking closely at the discourse within this community and comparing it to the known literature on RWE. Having a clear conceptual definition of how RWE appears in online discussion makes it easier to make direct comparisons and evaluate if the GamerGate community on Reddit is truly engaging in extremism. This study will use the definition of RWE provided in Perry & Scrivens (2018): "racially, ethnically, and sexually defined nationalism" (p. 171) that is exhibited through racism, misogyny, antisemitism, Islamophobia, homophobia, and transphobia. Antisemitism is frequently expressed by extremists as the idea that Jewish people control the government (Perry & Scrivens, 2016), an opinion that ties into general racist beliefs about how racial and ethnic minorities are going to replace white people (Perry & Scrivens, 2018). In white supremacist circles, this is referred to as "white genocide" caused by immigration of non-white people, the acceptance of non-Western cultures in Western societies, and the increase in mixed-race families (Perry & Scrivens, 2016).

GamerGate is often cited as an example of "geek masculinity" (Blodgett & Salter, 2018), a concept that ties in with the misogynist and antifeminist attitudes of RWE. Geek masculinity is aligned with geeky or nerdy interests like comic books and video games while also being entrenched in heteronormative and patriarchal ideas of gender and sexuality, and is threatened by the presence of those deemed to be "others" (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016).

When threats to masculinity are lashed out against in online spaces, this is referred to as "networked misogyny" (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016). Networked misogyny is characterized by the way misogyny and antifeminist hate speech moves in online spaces like Twitter and Reddit. Because virtual spaces allow for more connections between users that share similar beliefs, geek masculinity and networked misogyny appear to dominate many online spaces (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016).

In addition to manifest expression of bigotry like slurs, a common tactic by right wing extremists is to use latent words and phrases known as dogwhistles. Dogwhistles are innocuous phrases used by extremists and meant to only be understood by other extremists (Haney López, 2015), hence the name referring to the type of high-pitched whistle only dogs can hear. Dogwhistles are used in different ways, and research on how dogwhistles are used in extremist groups is still evolving. One way that dogwhistles are used is to signal that a conversation is about a particular minority group—like the triple parentheses, used (((like so))) around a person's name to signal that they are Jewish. Another way dogwhistles are used is to signal that a person is of a particular ideological group—such as the phrase "honk honk," which uses the same alliteration as "heil Hitler" and is used to signal that person holds neo-Nazi beliefs. By nature, dogwhistles are not meant to be obvious; they are meant to be used as an undetectable signal to other extremists (Henderson & McCready, 2018).

Previous research has theorized that online spaces foster hate speech due to the way these spaces resemble an "echo chamber," where hateful beliefs are reinforced by peers that share the same beliefs (Neumann, 2013; Weimann, 2012; Wojcieszak, 2010). Online spaces are often the place where both recruitment for RWE causes and radicalization towards RWE beliefs occur (Weimann, 2012). Wojcieszak (2010) referred neo-Nazi online discussion forums as "hornet's nests" because of the way participation in these forums increased extremist beliefs. In their qualitative content analysis of white supremacist online forums, Wong et al. (2015) found that common uses of online forums among right wing extremists included spreading propaganda, networking, and recruiting. In their study of the posting behaviours of right wing extremists online, Scrivens et al. (2020) found that an increase in participation in online right wing extremist communities does contribute to the echo chamber effect where extremist views are given encouragement from others within the forum, causing beliefs to grow more and more extreme.

## Reddit as a Toxic Technoculture

As previous research has shown, virtual spaces are commonly used by extremists for activities including recruitment, networking, and radicalization of extremist beliefs. It is not difficult to believe that a website as vast and widely used as Reddit would show similar signs of acting as an echo chamber for RWE, because Reddit similarly encourages actions that create a virtual echo chamber.

Toxic technocultures are defined as "retrograde ideas of gender, sexual identity, sexuality, and race and push against issues of diversity, multiculturalism, and progressivism" (Massanari, 2015, p. 5). Reddit allows users to score comments with "upvotes" and "downvotes," which

then sorts comments by displaying highest voted comments at the top. This leads to a bandwagoning effect, where comments and posts receive higher scores based on the fact that they were pushed to the top of the comment thread, while low-scoring comments are ignored. When posts containing hate speech receive upvotes from like-minded individuals, these posts are pushed to the top of the thread, increasing visibility of said hate speech and making it more likely that people will interact with the post (Massanari, 2015). In addition, the "hands off" moderation style common on Reddit allows hate speech to go unchecked. Individual subreddits are free to create their own rules on what behaviours are acceptable and unacceptable as long as the sitewide rules known as "Reddiquette" are followed; yet site admins rarely follow up on these rules. These factors combine to form online spaces where unmoderated hate speech is allowed to flourish, influencing the beliefs of users who spend most of their time there (Massanari, 2015).

Other studies have found that Reddit actually does not allow for the growth of a collective identity. Unlike other types of online forums, Reddit is a "hotbed for contestation" (Buyukozturk et al., 2018). In their study on GamerGate-related Reddit discussion threads from 2014 and 2015, Buyukozturk et al. (2018) found that Reddit actually caused barriers to discussion which prevented consensus among the users and actually led to diverging viewpoints. In effect, while overarching perspectives of Reddit assert the existence of echo-chamber communities, Buyukozturk et al.'s (2018) perspective on the GamerGate subreddit support the idea of a community fraught with disagreeableness and a lack of community cohesion. However, the current GamerGate community may be different from the one studied previously. Buyukozturk et al.'s (2018) study was conducted using much older data from the height of the GamerGate controversy when the community was still growing, and the "hotbed of contestation" may have "cooled down" since then. An interest in further insight into the current state of the GamerGate community is the reason this current study used the most recently available data instead of older data.

## Current Study Aims

Currently, there is a lack of understanding of why GamerGate became a vessel for extremist discussion, and while the reasons why have been theorized, no studies have been done to test this connection. The aim of the current study, therefore, was to fill this gap in the literature by employing a qualitative comparison between what is currently known about right wing extremism and the discussions occurring within these GamerGate communities.

## Research Methods

The current study was an exploratory content analysis (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011), with the aim of investigating the possible connection between the Reddit GamerGate community and RWE. Despite being a content analysis, this study was also in a sense a netnography, or an ethnography within a virtual space (Costello et al., 2017). While netnographies generally involve real-time observation of a virtual community, this study used archived data exclusively. I chose not to observe online interactions in real time; it would be too difficult to keep up with an ongoing discussion and archived Reddit data is more easily available. My main research

question for this study was "do the discussions happening within the GamerGate community r/KotakuInAction mirror the known literature on RWE discourse, and if so, how?"

The source of data for this study was Reddit; specifically, the GamerGate subreddit r/KotakuInAction. An initial dataset of archived Reddit posts was pulled using the date range September 20th to September 30th, 2019. This was the most recently available archived data, accessed from an online repository of all available Reddit data, which is available to be downloaded as an Excel file from the website GitHub (https://github.com/reddit-archive/reddit). Archived data can no longer be commented on or interacted with, meaning there is no risk of missing additional posts or replies after the data is downloaded. A ten-day range of data was selected in order to gather as much meaningful data possible without making the data collection process too overwhelming for a one-semester project.

A criterion sampling technique was used to select the final sample from the initially pulled data. Initial inclusion criteria specified the website Reddit, the subreddit r/KotakuInAction, and the date range the sample was pulled from. In addition, further inclusion criteria were used to ensure meaningful data were gathered. Specifically, the threads chosen had to be above 200 comments to ensure enough discussion had taken place within the thread to discern patterns and themes within the discussions. In addition, the thread itself had to have a score above +100. Reddit users score discussion threads based on how relevant the topic is to the community. By choosing threads with a total score above 100 it ensures consensus; that is, the topic of the thread has been deemed relevant to the community by the community members. Discussions with a high number of comments reflect that particular thread has been deemed interesting or discussion-worthy by the community. Finally, to ensure the current study looked at a diverse range of topics, discussion threads could not be about the same topic, i.e., duplicate topics were excluded. Every discussion thread from the selected date range that fit all inclusion criteria were included in the sample. The final sample was ten Reddit threads ranging in size between 205 and 383 comments, totaling 2720 comments.

Deductive themes were used as a starting point for the coding process. Relevant literature about RWE was used to establish a list of themes to monitor in the data. These included racism, misogyny, homophobia and transphobia, and the presence of dogwhistles. Data were analysed using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. Multiple coding cycles were employed during the coding process. In the first cycle of coding, each thread was read through from beginning to end to look for deductive themes that were developed from the literature. After that, the thread was read through once more to discern inductive themes, i.e., new themes that were not expected to appear based on the prior literature or were surprising. After the first cycle of coding was completed, the complete list of themes was reviewed in NVivo, beginning the second coding cycle. The aim of the second cycle was to establish patterns and overarching themes within the data.

Because this project used publicly accessible archived data, it was exempt from Research Ethics Board review. Because the users of r/KotakuInAction posted to a publicly accessible forum, it is not unreasonable to expect that anyone, including a researcher, could read the posts. In

addition, because of the public nature of Reddit, the subreddit users did not need to be informed about their involvement in a research study that looked at already-published archived data. There was no contact with the posters or the subreddit in general, as the intent of the study is simply to conduct a content analysis, not interact with the subreddit users to get data. The Internet offers some level of anonymity to those who use pseudonyms; however, usernames were left out from the final paper, as they were not relevant to the study's findings. In addition, leaving out usernames also protected the confidentiality of the subreddit users.

## Findings

A qualitative content analysis was conducted to examine the connection between GamerGate and RWE. Specifically, the goal was to compare the discourse happening within the Reddit community known as r/KotakuInAction with the known literature on the kinds of opinions expressed by right wing extremists. Ten discussion threads from between September 20th and September 30th, 2019 were examined, and three overarching themes emerged: "RWE bigotry," "always anti-left," and "hate speech is free speech." Each of these themes will be discussed in detail with direct quotes from the discussion threads included to illustrate each theme. To preserve the original voices of the Reddit users, all quotes are presented as-is, with no editing or corrections to spelling.

A surprising finding is that of the ten threads examined, only one was about the topic of video games. Specifically, it was a discussion about the criticism a particular video game received from reviewers for depicting violence. In this thread, the subreddit was defending the game's depictions of violence, and mocking the reviewers for criticizing the game. While there was one other thread that discussed a feminist critique of a tabletop board game, none of the other threads examined discussed video games; the focus of most of the other discussions were political or primarily held political or anti-left discussions. Two threads talked about superhero-genre films: one was a hate thread for the Marvel Cinematic Universe character Captain Marvel and the actress who portrays her, Brie Larson; the other was a discussion of the Joker movie starring Joaquin Phoenix, with a focus on arguing against leftist critique of the film. The Captain Marvel thread was filled with misogyny, but also held a lot of political beliefs about Larson being a feminist. The Joker thread was, in contrast, a celebration of the film's director talking about the far-left and far-right being "equally bad," and also contained a lot of anti-left discussion.

The remaining threads were less ambiguously political. Topics included the UN's guidelines for the creation of laws to stop illustrated child pornography; how the video game industry is criticized for being complacent in contributing to climate change; a discussion of alleged white supremacist dogwhistles; complaining about an anti-racism event held at a university; discussing the shutdown of the alt-right messageboard 8chan; and a discussion of how the subreddit r/KotakuInAction was included in a research study as an example of a "toxic" subreddit. It is difficult to say for sure if this small sample is indicative of the pattern of discussions happening within this subreddit, yet it is interesting that a subreddit allegedly dedicated to upholding ethics in video games journalism is so evidently political and right-wing.

## RWE Bigotry

The first major theme that emerged from the data was the numerous examples of RWE hate speech and bigotry exhibited by the subreddit users. There were numerous examples throughout every thread of the various kinds of hate speech that generally gets attributed to right wing extremists. Expressions of antisemitism, racism, misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia were common throughout the subreddit. Of greater interest, however, is the RWE argot used frequently within the subreddit.

### *Blatant hate speech*

Depiction of blatant hate speech included antisemitism, racism, misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia. Most of the examples of antisemitism came about in discussions of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), a Jewish organization created to oppose antisemitism (*What We Do*, n.d.). This community seemed to have a largely negative view of the ADL, exemplified through comments such as "The ADL is the mafia" (Thread 8, p. 1) and "ADL is a special interest group beholden to politicians who invent hate symbols to discredit opposition" (Thread 8, p. 1), suggesting the ADL has an ulterior motive in opposing hate speech. Other comments were more blatant about this motive, mirroring the antisemitic belief that Jewish people are trying to control the world: "They are Jewish and believe they should rule over all" (Thread 8, p. 14). Because antisemitism is such a large focus of RWE (Perry & Scrivens, 2018), it suggests this Reddit community holds the same beliefs about Jewish people as many extremists do.

Racism was generally exhibited through subtle comments rather than outright use of slurs, although there were exceptions. Often, comments containing racism overlapped with xenophobia, especially when middle eastern cultures came up in the discussion. One user, for instance, was criticizing "countries where forced marriage of a 9 year old is perfectly fine while a 35 year old showing her own knee is a crime" (Thread 1, p. 18). This is an example of both racism and xenophobia as well as a common criticism of Islam used by right wing extremists.

The LGBT community also received a significant amount of hate throughout the subreddit. In reference to LGBT individuals, one user said "they live in a bubble and self-victimize themselves incessantly" (Thread 10, p. 38). This comment mirrored other users' opinions of the LGBT community; much of the discourse was about how LGBT people need to stop complaining about how they are being treated. The most disturbing and hateful comments against the LGBT community came in the form of transphobia. One user stated "Dont forget the NHS clinics in the uk that are using your tax money to mutilate groomed children with hormones and surgeries" (Thread 1, p. 26), a reference to the transphobic notion that children are being groomed or forced to identify as trans, and an overall theme of disgust with trans bodies as well, as seen with the use of the word "mutilate."

Misogyny was a major topic throughout multiple threads, and often any sexist hate speech was accompanied by antifeminism. As mentioned earlier, one thread was dedicated to hating a particular fictional female character and the actress portraying her. In reference to the actress Brie Larson who portrayed the superhero Captain Marvel, one user stated "She's a mentally ill feminist and obviously she's bringing that to the table playing Capt Marvel, which by default

makes her completely unlikable as a person and on screen" (Thread 4, p. 42). The insult of "mentally ill feminist" mirrored other comments that called her "an unlikable, scolding and misogynistic misandric creep" (Thread 4, p. 52), and overall signaled a clear disgust towards women who identify as feminists or who regularly call out sexism, as Larson is know for doing (Abad-Santos, 2019). An interesting finding about the way female characters were discussed in the subreddit is while female characters were often ridiculed and criticized for reasons such as being emotionless, having too many emotions, being overly powerful, or being too weak, male characters from the same genre were largely given praise for being stoic, being caring, being extremely powerful, and for having realistic weaknesses. It is also interesting that there were more expressions of outright hate towards a fictional character than there was towards real women.

### RWE argot

A particularly interesting finding is how prevalent the use of RWE argot was throughout all of the threads. In particular, the use of dogwhistles by the subreddit users was both concerning as well as a direct and obvious indicator that this GamerGate community is inhabited by right wing extremists. Recall that dogwhistles are subtle phrases used as signals when communicating with other extremists (Haney López, 2015). One often-repeated dogwhistle was the phrase "honk honk" which was mentioned in five of the ten threads. As silly as it sounds, this phrase is indeed meant to signal "heil Hitler" due to its similar alliteration and use of the letter H (Holt, 2019). This dogwhistle was often used when discussing Jewish people, and usually went hand-in-hand with another dogwhistle: the phrase "clown world" (often portrayed using a clown emoji plus an Earth emoji). "Clown world" and "honk honk" are used often in alt-right memes that depict illustrations of clowns; the phrase is meant to symbolize a world controlled by the alt-right's enemies (Holt, 2019). Other dogwhistles used include the use of triple parenthesis, references to "globalism," and the use of the phrase "Anti-racism means anti-white" (Thread 10, p. 25). Out of all the themes found while analysing the data for this study, the blatant use of dogwhistles is probably the most concrete and concerning evidence of a connection between GamerGate and RWE.

Other RWE-specific language was commonly used in then ten discussion threads. Unlike dogwhistles, which were meant to be subtle, RWE jargon is used both to create a sense of community for the in-group and to "other" the out-groups they describe using these phrases. The first example of RWE lingo is the concept of an "NPC," an abbreviation used in video games meaning "non-player character." Within the context of a video game, an NPC is a character not controlled by the person playing the game. NPCs typically have limited and repetitive dialogue, follow the same routines, and overall do not break out of their pre-programmed mold. This definition is how the concept of a political NPC came about. In the context of RWE, a political NPC, like a video game NPC, does not break out of their pre-programmed mold (Roose, 2018). In contrast to extremists who see themselves as enlightened, NPCs mindlessly repeat the same limited dialogue. To right wing extremists, repetition of phrases regarding topics like racism, sexism, and other hate speech is evidence of being programmed. This mindset is evident in the following quote: "NPCs are always easier to control. You just have to tell them they are bad people if they don't agree" (Thread 7, p. 38).

The second example of RWE lingo that cropped up was the concept of a "soyboy," another word used by the alt-right to "other" people. Specifically, men who are seen as feminine, kind, or pushovers are called soyboys by the alt-right. With references to vegetarianism with the word "soy" as well as the use of "boy" instead of "man," this word is used to distance left-wing men from "true" men (Dunn, 2018); something that ties in with the concept of geek masculinity (Blodgett & Salter, 2018).

## Always Anti-left

The second major theme was concerned with how no matter what the discussion was about, there always had to be some sort of anti-left comment made. In other words, there was an overarching theme among GamerGaters of being against leftist discourse, no matter what. This included claiming the far-left is just as bad as the far-right, referring to themselves as victims of the left, and being anti-academia or anti-science in general.

### *The far-left is just as bad as us*

One of the anti-left arguments made by members of the GamerGate community was that the far-left and the far-right were either the same, or that the far-left is as hateful or more hateful than the far-right. An example of this sentiment about the similarities between the two sides was expressed by one user who said "The Far Left is more like the Far Right than it would like to believe. The problem lies that the Far Left has just too much control and power due to the tech and media industry" (Thread 7, p. 39). Interestingly, although many users expressed similar statements, most comments did not detail exactly in what ways the far-left and far-right were the same. Most simply said something along the lines of "The left is everything they claim to hate" (Thread 6, p 27). Any discussions that veered into the political realm was guaranteed to include a comment expressing distain for anything left-wing.

### *We are victims of the left*

In addition to claiming the left is ideologically similar to the right, there was also a common belief among the GamerGaters of being victims of the left. One user describes the left as "creating more monsters what with their constant derision of anything straight, white, christian and male" (Thread 7, p. 20). Many users talked about how when the left derides these groups it is not just derision, but an attack against them. In addition to calling it an attack, many go on to explain that this is the reason why extremists go on shooting sprees. This is a particularly interesting finding because it really delves into the reasons why right wing extremists and by extension the GamerGate community expresses such hostility towards anyone seen as an "other." Criticisms of heteronormativity, racism, sexism, and Christianity are seen as criticisms of the individuals themselves, rather than a critique of society.

### *Anti-science and anti-academia*

An interesting subtheme that came up was a considerable amount of anti-science and anti-academia sentiment. This community expressed hostility toward anything deemed to be related to the political left, including science and academia. One user compared science to a cult: "At some point Science became a religion with most of the bad things that religion can

being a very little of the good things. So I guess a cult" (Thread 5, p. 62). Another user, referring to social sciences as fake science, stated "This bullshit is faulty process. True science starts with a question and works to find an answer; fake science with an agenda starts with an answer they desire, and works back to find a way to make it seem correct" (Thread 6, p. 37). There was overt disdain towards social sciences, particularly anything considered progressive: "any Gender Studies or Black History type classes need to be discontinued" (thread 10, p. 34). These anti-science beliefs were discussed most often in one particular thread which talked about a recently-published study that looked at hateful subreddits. Because r/KotakuInAction was included as one of these in the study, members of the community were not happy about being called a hateful, toxic subreddit and reacted by calling the study itself "fake science."

An interesting subset of the anti-science discourse was a large amount of climate change denial. The reason for this is possibly because climate activism is associated with the left. One thread in particular was ripe with climate change denial; the discussion focused on an article criticizing the video games industry for being wasteful and harmful to the environment. Users were hostile towards the idea that video games might have a negative environmental impact and used the discussion space to lash out against people they referred to as "climate alarmists." One user said Greta Thunberg, a well-known teenage activist, "is being exploited by the cult this movement has become. Not surprising since her parents are far leftists" (Thread 5, p. 56). Another user stated that they "used to be somewhat convinced and concerned about climate change and so forth, but the more we've gone on the less I'm sure it's as big a problem as they're saying" (Thread 5, p. 47). This thread was yet another example of a critique of the community being responded to with hostility.

## Hate Speech is Free Speech

The final major theme that emerged from the data came about from examining the numerous arguments about what is or is not hate speech. A significant number of commenters argued for their right to use hate speech such as slurs as an example of freedom of speech. Many users argued that censorship or denying people the ability to say whatever they want is a bigger problem than the effects that hate speech have on the people it targets. Arguments about how hate speech is free speech was usually divided into either defending hate speech or denying the existence of hate speech.

### *Defending hate speech*

Users defending the use of hate speech did so either by saying it is their right to use hate speech if they choose to, or by saying that as long as it is a joke, it is fine to use it. Users concerned with the censorship of hate speech framed it as being a necessary form of speech; this is portrayed in the following comment about being respectful to trans people by using correct pronouns: "It's a nice sentiment. Except what it does seems to be protect feelings, breaks free speech laws, is not scientifically proven and we need to be able to discuss it using words" (Thread 6, p 43). This user is more concerned with the fact that asking people to respect someone's pronouns "breaks free speech laws" than with being respectful at all. It is entirely plausible that this user is using the concept of free speech to defend their transphobia, but the

fact that this is what they choose to say is indicative of the community's opinions on free speech.

GamerGaters see the censorship of hate speech as a battle to be fought. Users in a different thread were discussing how "the line of people being censored on the internet for wrongthink is only growing" (Thread 7, p. 41); again, a complaint against censorship online. The use of the word "wrongthink" here is another piece of RWE lingo, referring to hate speech. Using the term wrongthink makes it easier for the community to parse their views on what is right and wrong; by derogatorily labelling hate speech "wrongthink," the community is able to justify their "defiance" of what is labelled to be wrong versus what they think is actually wrong.

Users also defended hate speech by calling it a necessary part of humour. As one user stated, "I mean, you need a sense of humor to meme, and everything is sexist, racist, misogynist, homophobic, transphobic and etc" (Thread 6, p. 9). According to this user, in order to be funny, you must be bigoted. By defending the use of bigoted comments in comedy, the users of this subreddit normalize bigoted comments in non-comedic contexts as well. Normalizing hate speech through humour is in fact a common technique of right wing extremists; by shrouding the underlying message in humour, hostile extremist messages are able to be circulated within non-extremist circles with ease (Winter, 2019).

### Denying hate speech

In contrast to defending the use of hate speech, users also frequently denied the existence of "hate speech" as a concept at all. This is exemplified by quotes such as "hate speech doesn't really exist. Just speech they don't like" (Thread 6, p. 40) and "hate speech doesnt exist. cuz whoever has the social power/power, is the arbiter of deciding what is hate speech" (Thread 6, p. 87). To these users, hate speech is simply a social construct, and because they believe the left is the group in power, they are able to assert that what is and is not considered hate speech was decided upon by people with a vested interest in attacking those who choose to use hate speech.

## Discussion

Using archived comments from Reddit's main GamerGate community r/KotakuInAction, the current study explored the discourse happening within the community in order to compare it to the known literature on RWE. Previous literature on this topic has not formally examined the connection between right wing extremism and GamerGate, despite such a connection being theorized. As a preliminary exploration into testing this connection, the findings of this study supported prior literature on the structure of both online extremist groups and GamerGate. Geek masculinity (Blodgett & Salter, 2018) was a major finding; this was not surprising considering the already significant presence of misogyny and antifeminism in gaming communities (Heron et al., 2014). Another major finding was the existence of behaviour that supports the notion of Reddit being a toxic technoculture (Massanari, 2015).

The Reddit GamerGate community displayed much of the same hate speech expressed by RWE, including antisemitism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, and misogyny (Perry & Scrivens,

2018). The community's use of dogwhistles and RWE lingo was an important discovery. The familiarity and extensive use of this vocabulary suggests some kind of connection between GamerGate and RWE that allowed such vocabulary to transfer over. This paints a clearer picture of the ideological framework shared by the GamerGate forum and RWE.

Some unexpected findings included the expression of anti-science and anti-academic beliefs and the defense of hate speech as free speech. Both themes tied into an overarching expression of being anti-left: anything associated with the left was considered worthy of criticism by this community. In addition, the left was seen as fronting an attack against GamerGate and their beliefs. Overall, these themes are indicative of the need for further exploration of these topics.

This study raises some implications about the phenomenon of RWE in online communities. First, it is clear that RWE is present in communities that were not created strictly for the exchange of extremist beliefs and extremism can show up in something as commonplace as a community dedicated to video games. Next, it is still not known whether GamerGate started out with extremists in their midst or if the extremists joined later on, but the fact is that the community, as it currently stands, is effectively and in substance a right wing extremist community. Finally, as it was previously mentioned, being able to identify extremism is essential to preventing its spread (Perry & Scrivens, 2016), so any study that is able to establish a link between a community and RWE is important.

## Limitations and Future Research

There were a few limitations of this study. The presence of a single-semester time limit meant that it was not possible to analyse more than ten individual discussion threads. Because of this, there is a possibility that some opinions were over-represented or under-represented in the data. Another limitation was the date range of the data, which was chosen to be no more than ten days to keep the data collection process as simple as possible, which also meant the opinions analysed were limited to those found within the date range.

Future research for this type of study would benefit from a larger set of data in general, but it would also benefit from a mixed-methods style of study. Combining a qualitative content analysis with a quantitative analysis would be useful in not only being able to analyse patterns and themes but test them with a statistical analysis as well.

## Conclusion

As a starting point for exploration into the connection between GamerGate and RWE, this qualitative content analysis found numerous examples of mirrored opinions between the two groups, suggesting that r/KotakuInAction is now indeed a right wing extremist community. The current study is in alignment with previous literature on the GamerGate community and the discourse found within, along with the literature on RWE. A further line of inquiry on the extremism observed within GamerGate could be useful in answering how something as innocuous as gaming could become a host to such hostile beliefs.

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# "Cyber Bullying Stays with You": A Textual Analysis of a Subreddit Involving Cyberbullying Victims

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**Abstract.** The social phenomenon of cyberbullying, as well as its impact on people's lives, has resulted in a substantial amount of research being conducted in the field. This phenomenon has been especially exacerbated through the emergence of Reddit, a platform hosting thousands of smaller communities where users can socially connect digitally (Reddit, 2020). The current study examined the experiences of cyberbullying victims that were publicly shared in a subreddit (a community residing within Reddit) named *Cyberbullying*. A total of 86 posts, including 123 comments were analyzed using thematic content analysis, with five major themes emerging: advice seeking, senses of regret, negative impacts of cyberbullying, effective coping strategies, and long-term effects of cyberbullying. Findings from this study suggest that social media environments could bring both negative and positive consequences to cyberbullying victims. The results can contribute to new directions for future research, development of intervention programs, and potential policy implications related to reduction and prevention of cyberbullying behaviour.

## Introduction

### Defining Cyberbullying Behaviour

Cyberbullying is not a new form of bullying behaviour; many researchers have agreed that cyberbullying should be seen as an extension of traditional bullying behaviour carried by individuals through digital means (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Smith et al., 2008). Building on definitions of traditional bullying, the notion of repetitive behaviour and power imbalances between bullies and victims are considered as important elements to define cyberbullying behaviour (Lee, Zi-Pei, Svanstrom, & Dalal, 2013; Menesini, Nocentini, & Camodeca, 2013; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Smith et al. (2008) defined cyberbullying as behaviour "carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself" (p.376).

Smith, del Barrio, and Tokunaga (2013) suggested it is important to determine the types of online behaviour that are deliberate and bullying in nature. Some of the common cyberbullying behaviour identified in literature include cyber harassment and threatening communications using electronic devices (Hazelwood & Koon-Magnin, 2013). Li (2007) reported a total of seven categories of cyberbullying, including: actions of cyberstalking (stalking and harassing an

individual online), flaming (sending inappropriate messages), harassment, denigration (spreading harmful and untrue statements), outing[1], masquerade[2], as well as exclusion. In their study of youth perception on cyber bullying, Vandebosch and Van Cleemput (2008) have outlined some specific cyberbullying occasions such as: spamming of individual's messaging accounts or digital devices, creating and spreading gossip, fabricated stories, or inappropriate pictures and videos online; as well as sending humiliating or threatening messages either privately or publicly through digital platforms (p.501).

Definitions of cyberbullying provided in Li's (2007) research were adopted in this study as it provided the most detailed descriptions over the types of online behaviour that are considered cyberbullying. The types of behaviour proposed by Li (2007) were used to distinguish cyberbullying and non-cyberbullying experiences in the dataset. As this qualitative study aimed to take on the unique perspectives of cyberbullying victims, more considerations were given to their subjective feelings toward inappropriate messages they received online.

## Cyberbullying Experience: Why is it Important?

With the proliferation of online services and technological advancements, more people are exposed to various types of cyberbullying (Mesch, 2009). Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts (2010) showed that after 2000, digital media usage among youth aged between 8 to 18 years old has increased rapidly in developed countries. Patchin and Hinduja's (2006) early research on cyberbullying behaviour revealed high prevalence and seriousness of online bullying that they attributed to the lack of constraint or limitations available in cyberspace. This notion was supported by Mesch (2009), who suggested that availability of the Internet and various chat rooms and social media platforms has increased people's exposure to strangers and pushed these users toward elevated risks of cyberbullying.

### *Negative Consequences*

Most notably, many researchers have brought up the issue of anonymity in cyberspace and how bullies have exploited the option of anonymity when sending aggressive messages to their targets. As explained by Mesch (2009), users' decisions to use pseudo-identities online will decrease their level of accountability and inhibition, thus increasing their ability to deliver harmful, harassing, and defamatory comments online with no consequences to themselves. Particularly, many cyber bullies would register various email and social media accounts online in order to ensure their true identities remain undetected by both victims and law enforcement (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). This has made it particularly difficult for cyberbully victims to develop effective coping strategies to overcome their experiences with bullies online.

In a study conducted by Smith et al. (2008) about cyberbullying among 11 to 16-year-old pupils, it was found that many cyberbully victims held a pessimistic view over methods to stop cyberbullying. Many students believed that it was hard to cope with cyberbullying because

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[1] Outing has been defined as behavior where someone spreads private information of an individual without his or her consent.
[2] Impersonating someone with the intention to cause harm to the individual and/or damage one's reputation.

methods such as banning phones or Internet usage provided minimal help to prevent bullies from approaching them (Smith et al., 2008). Among all of the available methods that cyberbullying victims can use, the majority of the participants agreed that blocking, seeking social support, as well as switching to new accounts/numbers are more effective strategies (Smith et al., 2008). However, subsequent research by Schenk and Fremouw's (2012) reported both male and female cyberbully victims are more likely to employ passive coping strategies such as avoidance, withdraw from online activities, or seek help from trusted individuals.

The connectivity and anonymity brought by the Internet have yielded more severe consequences than traditional bullying. Prolonged electronic bullying experiences often yield to psychological distress such as heightened anxiety levels, fear, depressive symptoms, as well as low self-esteem (Hazelwood & Koon-Magnin, 2013; Bauman, 2013). In some extreme cases, individuals may engage in self-inflicted harm or suicidal ideation and attempts (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Schenk & Fremouw, 2012). Feelings of defenselessness are also typical among victims since they were unable to permanently escape from cyberbullying situations; many victims receive undesirable messages or phone calls on a daily basis (Smith et al., 2008).

### *Positive Consequences*

While acknowledging the negative impacts digital platforms can bring to cyberbully victims, recent studies have attempted to identify some of the positive consequences technology can bring to vulnerable population such as cyberbullying victims (McLoughlin, Spears, & Taddeo, 2018; Naslund, Aschbrenner, Marsch, & Bartels, 2016). Naslund et al. (2016) proposed that online social media support could provide mentally distressed individuals platforms to connect and support each other. According to their study, effective coping strategies and experiences may be shared within the social network, providing benefit to all users (Naslund et al., 2016). Focusing specifically on cyberbully victims, McLoughlin et al. (2018) suggested that online social connection between young victims may act as a buffer that helps individuals cope with their traumatic experiences with cyberbullies and promote better mental health.

### The Current Study

The subreddit *Cyberbullying* provides an online platform for its users to share their stories and connect with others with similar experiences (Reddit, 2020). Since its creation in 2012, the subreddit has attracted almost 500 members to join and share resources and personal stories that are related to cyberbullying (Reddit, 2020). Although extensive research has been conducted toward cyberbullying behaviour, studies about online communities such as subreddits have rarely attracted researchers' attention. Serving as a support group where experiences and opinions over cyberbullying can be exchanged, *Cyberbullying* thus contained rich, unexplored data that would potentially lead to meaningful findings.

I was interested in exploring the experiences shared by cyberbullying victims through a thematic content analysis of stories shared in the *Cyberbullying* subreddit. Researching members' experiences are particularly of interest as these shared stories provide an in-depth understanding of common feelings, reactions, as well as positive and negative impacts cyberbullying behavior has brought to its victims. Additionally, I hoped the current study might

also provide insight on how the efficacy of victim support programs and cyberbully prevention strategies and policies might be improved.

## Methodology

### Data Sources and Collection

Data for this study were collected from the Cyberbullying victims subreddit (https://www.reddit.com/r/cyberbullying/), a publicly accessible online community. Per SFU Ethics Policy (R20.01), publicly available data are not subject to ethics review and are considered minimal risk. A purposive sampling technique was employed where posts within the target subreddit were sorted by "all time top," ranged from most popular to least popular posts within the community. The most popular posts were examined first because they have been subjected to more views and comments, thus richer, more valuable data could be obtained prior to the analysis over less popular posts. Over 300 posts in the subreddit were captured, comprising all posting on the site from October 7th, 2012 to March 26th, 2020.

From among those posts, criterion sampling was employed. The first criterion for inclusion required that the comments in subreddit must be provided either by cyberbully victims or someone speaking on behalf of them, sharing their experiences of being victimized. Secondly, specific attention was paid toward events that made reference to some form of electronic device or communication.

### Data Analysis

After applying the selection criteria to the posts, a total of 86 posts including 123 comments were ultimately retained for later coding and analysis. Posts and comments were then copied and pasted within a Word document, and usernames were replaced with letters (e.g., User A, User B, User Z, etc.) in the results section in order to protect users from exposing their online identities.

For the purpose of this study, a thematic content analysis was conducted to uncover the common experiences shared by cyberbully victims. A total of four rounds of coding were conducted.

Having some knowledge with regards to cyberbullying and its impact on cyberbully victims, I was able to have some general expectations over potential themes that may emerge from the current data set. Regardless of the basic knowledge I obtained prior to conducting this study, I was mentally prepared to conduct my coding and analysis process as if I did not have any knowledge over the topic and was open to all possible codes. To address the confirmation bias that I may engage during coding process, inductive coding methods were therefore applied during second, third, and forth rounds of the coding process, allowing main themes to emerge from the dataset. Open coding was used in the first two rounds of coding, allowing the establishment of descriptive codes through reading and data analysis (Palys & Atchison, 2013). Multiple rounds of coding were employed to ensure the validity of the codes.

As some of the cyberbully stories posted by victims can be dense and tug at readers' emotions, it became difficult for me to distance myself after focusing on the data for long periods of time. In order to address this issue, I took breaks during coding the process and tried to make memos of how I felt and how my emotions may have affected my coding. These memos and breaks allowed me to remind myself of my role as a researcher.

More analytical codes were added in later rounds of the coding process as these codes often require analyses over latent meanings within the text (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The codes I have identified ranged in size from a few words, a section of a sentence, a sentence, to small paragraphs. I have applied a deductive coding approach to my codes during the third and last round of coding in order to re-examine and re-arrange my codes into appropriate theme categories. A total of 9 codes emerged from the data set that were later collapsed into five main themes.

## Results

As seen in Table 1, a total of five main themes were identified after three rounds of coding: "I was so hurt", "This experience will stay with me for life", "Its been dealt with", "Please help me", and "I really wish I would …". Within the themes, two sub-themes were identified in "I was so hurt", and four subthemes were categorized under theme "Its been dealt with". A complete list of the themes and subthemes that have emerged from the current dataset can be found in Table 1 below. Overall, the findings in the present study were consistent with results in previous literature (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Parris, Varjas, Meyers, & Cutts, 2012; Smith et al., 2008); experiences such as trauma, coping strategies, as well as consequences of cyberbullying are common themes being brought up by users within the subreddit.

**Table 1. Primary codes, categories and frequencies**

| Code | Sub-codes | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| "I was so hurt" | – Psychological trauma | 74 |
| | – Reputational damage | 24 |
| "This experience will stay with me for life" | | 77 |
| "Its been dealt with" | – Blocking and Deleting | 24 |
| | – Confrontation | 18 |
| | – Social Support | 15 |
| | – Official Means | 13 |
| "Please help me" | | 56 |
| "I really wish I would …" | | 23 |

## "I was so hurt" [3]

Not surprisingly, the description of various forms of trauma received by cyberbully victims was considered to be one of the most prominent recurring themes emerging from the current data

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[3] User A

set. When describing the trauma they have received, the majority of the users tend to revolve around two types of negative impacts resulting from cyberbullying: (1) psychological trauma; and (2) reputational damage.

### Psychological Trauma

Mental distress such as sadness, depression, or lowered self-esteem have often been brought up by cyberbully victims in the comments. One user B stated that:

> I noticed them (the bullies) mock me for my looks in the hallways at school which I brushed off most of the time but now [after it has gone online] it's starting to get to me. (…) At this point I feel really upset about the situation and don't know what to do. Even now it's really affecting me negatively. Now I'm too ashamed to get into photos and removed all the mirrors from my room.

The statement revealed that users like B were likely to suffer from severe psychological distress such as lowered self-esteem and loss of confidence once the mocking and bullying behaviour transitioned to digital environments.

Other users expressed feelings of fear and anxiety under circumstances where cyberbullies were able to obtain personal information about them. User C was particularly concerned about cyberbullies' doxing[4] behaviour because "my address, SSN, drivers license number and way more has been posted [online]. Similar to this user, another user did not only have his personal information published online, but also received various personal attacks that impacted his daily life.

> Sometimes they are able to recruit mobs (almost always from reddit) when I post something that garners a lot of attention (2009 and 2010), to personally attack me and people associated with me, calling our homes, offices, etc. Just plain scary stuff.

The levels of emotional disturbance experienced by users also vary considerably and depend on individual perception and the way they handle the situation. While the majority of users reported experiencing mild to moderate emotional distress, some users have suffered from severe conditions like self-harm and impacts to physical health. As a consequence of constant cyber harassment, User D found her sister's conditions had deteriorated: "in just a few days her blood pressure dropped to 90/50, she got fevers, woke up in the middle of the night with her heart racing, it was terrible to watch."

### Reputational Damage

More than twenty users within the subreddit also discussed the damage to their reputations they incurred after encountering cyberbullies. Damage to personal image typically occurred when cyberbullies made up defamatory stories or accused victims on social media platforms of

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[4] Doxing refers to behaviour where cyberbullies obtain access to individuals' personal information and reveal these data online. See Douglas, D. M. (2016). Doxing: a conceptual analysis. *Ethics of Information Technology*, *18*(3), 199-210.

something they had never done. One user believed that cyberbullies spread fabricated stories about them online because they can "save their own butt and avoid any legal action by making fake facebook posts about me making me look racist, islamaphobic, xenophobic" (User E). Another victim, User F, noted that such cyberbullying tactics were also employed because it allowed bullies to justify their behaviour, presenting themselves as "the heroes … [while they are] framing me for like bad things" and fighting against those people who are deemed to be "morally corrupt".

Spreading false accusations online often yielded serious and long-term consequences to cyberbully victims in their daily lives.

> … 5 months later her posts still remain and her following increasing exponentially, so I still feel the effects today. I find it hard to find work for models to shoot with. As a result, I had to switch to corporate photograph/video and move away from her city, even though fashion is my passion and I loved that city.

As described by User G, a photographer who claimed to be accused by his ex-girlfriend as someone who "lures women into bed" and cheated during their romantic relationship, these posts made by the ex-girlfriend have negatively affected his professional career and resulted in long term damage to his reputation.

### "This experience will stay with me for life" [5]

The second theme that emerged from the current data set was also one of the most prominent themes brought up by users. Many users reported that their coping strategies were ineffective in stopping cyberbullying from happening and that perpetrators would always find ways to bully them. For instance, User I believed that cyberbullies cannot be stopped or avoided at all:

> He's made about 20 accounts that I consistently block. … after that its been non stop. He just msged my brother and has messaged my dad and mom before. I've contacted the cops a few months ago but had no on[e] to serve his restraining order nor do I know where he lives. I really don't know what to do anymore. I want him to disappear.

This user's experience was quite common among cyberbully victims because oftentimes cyber bullies were able to return to social media and continue bullying the victims by using other accounts. Even if the users had the cyberbullies' accounts blocked and reported them to service providers to have the accounts banned, the bullies could always create an unlimited number of new profiles and continue their cyberbullying.

According to the subreddit posts, many users believed that reporting cyberbullies to law enforcement is useless since "police never care" (User J). In a later comment, User J explained to others that reporting to police is useless because "they only do something when someone actually attempts to physically harm you, then they step in". J's claim was confirmed in another

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[5] User H

post, where User K also said police were passive about policing cyberbullying and told him "well, he's [the bully's] probably not going to hurt you, he's not a known criminal."

The long-lasting consequence of cyberbullying to its victims should also be highlighted.

> It's pretty laughable, looking back, but the pain remains, the memory is stuck in my head like a scar and every day the cruel words said to me bounce around in my brain over and over. … No matter who you are or what your age is, cyber bullying stays with you. The pain lingers, but that's nothing compared to the memory that will always be there… Cyberbullying is psychological abuse and the effects are serious and long-lasting.

Although describing her experience as laughable after moving on from her previous encounter with cyber bullies, User K nevertheless pointed out that the negative impact of such experience have been imprinted in her brain "like a scar". In another example, User L reflected that the impact of cyberbullying is "is stuck with me" even when it happened years ago.

## "It's been dealt with" [6]

Users in Cyberbullying subreddit also shared coping strategies they considered to be effective to other members. In this theme, four sub themes reflected the common resolutions that cyberbully victims would use to cope with their experience: "blocking and deleting," "confrontation," "official means," and "social support."

### *Blocking and deleting*

Reactive strategies such as blocking cyberbullies' accounts, deleting unwanted messages or personal comments, as well as deleting individuals' own accounts were offered as one of the most effective ways to stop cyberbullying. Using these strategies often allowed users to avoid possible communication with the cyberbullies in the hope that they would go away. For instance, one of the users acknowledged that any kind of engagement or interaction with cyberbullies is not recommended because "even telling the person 'Stop it! Don't contact me!" is 'encouragement'" (User N).

When simple blocking and avoidance failed to stop the bullies, some users would make new social media accounts and disappear from the bullies' eyes. Having received mean messages and being doxed online, User O thought it was better to disconnect with previous accounts and start with new ones.

> … a few years back I had to delete my account and made new ones to hide my real identity so my advice to you is to delete your accounts and make new accounts to hide but don't use your real name or your pets name … and don't tell people who you actually are

It is recommended by victims to create accounts that hide both your identity and connections with previous accounts in order to avoid detection by cyber bullies.

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[6] User M

## Confrontation

Confrontation was coded when users were involved in direct conversations with their bullies and protected themselves from future cyberbullying by publicly exposing the cyberbullies. In response to hate messages sent by the bullies, some of the users would initiate in-person contacts with the bullies and attempt to address any disagreements or conflicts privately. Usually, the victims would ask the bullies to stop spamming their accounts with harassing posts and comments online. For example, User P was able to successfully stop the bully from attacking him online after resolving his issues privately with the bully over different views on computer selections. According to P, "I won. … [the bully] gave up, then I told him that I wasn't being fangirly or whatever sparked it".

In some cases, cyberbully victims may confront their bullies by publicizing their experience and exposing the bullies' information online. While only a few users within the data set have employed this method, it was considered to be more effective than in-person conversations in stopping cyberbullying.

> My stalker finally backed off when I made a video exposing what they had said to me and how scared it made me, and I shared it online with everyone I knew. Then I published a petition demanding that police be more equipped to track these people down and handle them. My advice to you is to be as public about the fact that you have a stalker as possible, … Hopefully it'll scare the stalker off.

The above excerpt was from a user (Q) who previously was a victim of cyberstalking and harassment. After trying different methods, she concluded and recommended her fellow subreddit members to speak publicly about their situations since bullies might back off once they realized their identity may have been exposed. However, it is important to note that only a few cyberbully victims would use coping strategies like this as it often required a lot of strength and encouragement for the victim to speak publicly spoke about their experiences.

## Social support

Seeking social support from trusted friends, lovers, as well as family members is also commonly used by cyberbully victims. User R, a 13 year old boy cyberbullied by a group of his friends due to his mental disorder, stated in his comment that "I talked to my supportive friend of mine to stop them [the bullies] from exposing me [with my conditions] I wanna pretty much thank my supportive friend which is a girl that I like the most."

In another post titled "Justice for Noah," User S briefly talked about how his son Noah was being ganged up upon for no reason and therefore is defending his son.

> I ask you to go to this guys channel and comment Justice For Noah on his videos, … this is for justice for my son and I want to show him [my son] there are good people in this world. … this whole experience [of being cyberbullied] ruined my son and like I said, I want to show him normal people don't act like this.

Based on these statements, it is apparent that emotional support is not the only type of help received by cyberbully victims; upon knowledge of the phenomenon, many peers or family members would attempt to prevent further bullying and defend their friends or children/siblings.

### *Official means*

Attempts to stop cyberbullying by reporting to officials such as school personal, Internet service providers, as well as law enforcement also were reported by *Cyberbullying* users. Judging by the comments posted in the subreddit, reporting the cyberbullies to service providers appeared to be a more successful tactic than going to law enforcement or school administrators.

For example, User T, appreciated the involvement of moderators in the subreddit that she was a victim of:

> In September 2012, it [the bullies in this subreddit] got so crazy the admins acted, by banning my account from the subreddit. I actually thanked them for it, as I no longer felt like I absolutely had to keep defending myself, because I largely couldn't.

Another user (U) described in his comment that he is no longer experiencing cyberbullying because "I reported it multiple times over the past week. It was finally removed …".

If users decide to report the cyberbullies to school administrators or law enforcement, the success rate is dependent upon the policies that are available in the area, as well as people's perceptions of cyberbullying. Reports were more likely to succeed if stricter policies were implemented.

> I will go to his [school principle's] office, knock on his door, show him the evidence and expect to have him expelled from school. … Edit: He got expelled.

In the above excerpt provided by User V, she reported to have the cyberbully in her school expelled as her school implemented a new policy to expel students who engage in cyberbullying behaviour.

### "Please help me" [7]

The fourth theme, "please help me", can be traced back to the common reason for many users to join the subreddit. Most of the users within the community decided to share their cyberbully stories with the intent to seek either advice or help and support from other users. Many users treated the community as a safe place to share their experiences and seek support from each other. Typically, users would provide a brief description of their situation and request people who have similar experiences to give them suggestions about what they could have done to end the cyberbullying. For instance, User X was seeking help from other community members

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[7] User W

after both he and his girlfriend had been receiving unwanted calls and messages for months with failed attempts to stop the bullies. In his post, User X stated:

> We both blocked the account but somehow they still manage to get unblocked (…). I'm running out of patience on what to do and I even have proof of the harassment. I don't know how they can unblock themselves and instagrams support system is useless.

While the majority of the users were posting to seek help because they did not know what they should do to handle the cyberbullying they were victims of, a handful of other users decided to also ask members to help stop cyberbullying by reporting the bullies online or spread the words around.

> I don't want other people revealing my username online and I'm afraid if the video doesn't get removed fast others will start to do the same thing. So please help me if you can by reporting the video and give me advice if you can.

The above quote served as an example of how users seek help in *Cyberbullying* subreddit. As a target of digital bullying who had hateful YouTube videos made by cyberbullies published online, User W decided to ask community members to help him take the video down.

## "I really wish I would …" [8]

This theme involved acknowledging the sense of regret described by cyberbully victims, and was noted by only a small number of users in their comments. Although the frequency of statements related to the theme was relatively lower than the other four themes identified in the present study, the underlying feelings mentioned by the victims were still considered to be an important finding that emerged from the data set.

Users who expressed this type of feeling were regretful about either a specific act or some statements they viewed these as the trigger that somehow got them involved in a series of cyberbullying events later on. In a post written by User Z, she described herself as: "a just chatting e-girl kinda streamer on twitch who very stupidly and much regretfully got romantically involved with one of my top donator on twitch over a year ago" as she got cyberstalked and harassed online due to her bad decision to flirt with others. According to her:

> … we started drifting apart [in this relationship] and I started flirting with others before breaking up with him (bitch move I know Im a piece of shit for that, and yes Ive apologized a ton of times) but he holds it against me …

Another victim, User AA, mentioned that she regretted her decision to mindlessly trust the "friends" she made with whom she had shared extensive information about herself. In her comment, she stated that these decisions she made let her "be vulnerable … [and now] your personal details are in dangerous hands and could be shared with others in any way they please". The statements revealed that after being cyberbullied, many users – like User Z and

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[8] User Y

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User AA – wished they had not engaged in any of these past behaviours that ultimately resulted in the cyberbullying or made pre-existing cyberbullying behavior worse.

Some users also spoke briefly of their regret for not taking actions or recording down the evidence of cyberbullying during the time they were being victimized. After engaging in a new debate with a user who previously bullied her, User Y commented to the bully that "I really wish I would have screenshotted everything and didn't just go and delete the stream where you burst in bashing me all to high hell." To User Y, recording down evidence was the only way she could prove to other users that she was victimized by the bully.

## Discussion and Conclusion

### Contextualizing the Findings

The themes uncovered in the current study have provided a broad overview of several issues related to cyberbullying that have commonly been mentioned by cyberbullying victims. Certainly the themes I observed in the *Cyberbullying* subreddit are consistent with previous research findings on the negative and positive impacts associated with cyberbullying behaviour (Hinduja & Patchin, 2006; Smith et al., 2008; Parris et al., 2012).

Discussions over negative impacts brought by cyberbullying experiences are prominent among posts submitted by cyberbully victims. Specifically, it appears that cyberbully victims often talk about the emotional distress (e.g., depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, etc.) and long-term damage to their personal lives within the posts. This is consistent with findings in Schenk and Fremouw's (2012) research – that cyber-bullied individuals are prone to depression, feelings of sadness, or extreme behaviours such as suicidal behaviours. In a similar study done by Spears, Tadeo, Daly, Stretton, and Karklins (2015), cyberbully victims would experience significantly in symptoms of stress, depression, and anxiety. Expanding on the extensively studied psychological impacts of cyberbullying, this study was able to contribute new information about how cyberbully victims may be impacted negatively by defamatory cyberbully behaviours. For example, some users have expressed difficulties in finding jobs or maintaining normal lifestyles after slanderous allegations were made and spread by bullies online.

 Further, different types of coping strategies adopted by cyberbully victims have also been routinely brought up and shared between members online. In this study, the coping strategies used by subreddit members have been categorized into four main categories: blocking and deleting, direct confrontations with the bullies, social support from trusted individuals, as well as seeking resolution through official complaints. However, the current results highlighted the issue of a re-occurrence of cyberbullying behaviour, in which many of the victims have complained about the ineffectiveness of various coping strategies. For example, the returning of cyberbullies in social media would be expected. Also, many cyberbully victims expressed the view, that "police never care" (User Y).

The coping skills noted in the current study are similar to those reported by Sam, Wisender, Schuitemaker, and Jarvis-Selinger (2018). Their study on the impact of cyberbullying on Aboriginal youth found that their interviewees will overcome the impact of cyberbullying through ignoration, seeking help, as well as to increase self-awareness on cyber security (Sam et al., 2018). According to Parris et al. 's (2012) study, the majority of the students they studied reported using reactive coping methods (ignoring, accepting bullies' behaviour) and preventive coping tactics (direct communications, increasing self-awareness and cybersecurity). A small proportion of students also discussed the issue of reoffending, where the perception that there is "no way to prevent cyberbullying" and the returning of bullies is prevalent among these participants (p.297).

The passive policing strategies discussed by users were addressed by Broll and Huey (2015). In-depth interviews conducted with Canadian police officers revealed that many officers choose not to solve or prevent cyberbullying because such behaviour has not been deemed as criminal (Broll & Huey, 2015). Many officers also thought that the current legislation addressing issues such as harassment and bullying behaviour was enough to punish cyberbullies, making it unnecessary to employ new laws specifically to prevent cyberbullying behaviour. Rather, the enforcement agencies expressed support for pre-existing legislations, but also noted the necessity of establishing educational programs and teaching students not to engage in cyberbullying behaviour (Broll & Huey, 2015). Broll and Huey's (2015) results have provided some insight into cyberbully victims' perceptions over seeking help from the police, as police officers themselves are reactive in issues related to cyberbullying; officers considered many cyberbullying activities (such as online harassment and mean text messages) as inappropriate activities yet these behaviour were not serious enough to receive law enforcement's attention. Many participants also expressed that parents and school teachers should be considered to handle problems with cyber bullies before bringing in police officers (Broll & Huey, 2015).

In addition, this study also contributed new information with regards to the benefits that technology (such as social media) can bring to cyberbully victims. As one of the emerging themes for this study, many users have treated the subreddit as a support group and posted their experience with the attempt to seek advice or support. This form of social interaction and support, as suggested by McLoughlin et al. (2018), could be positive for cyberbully victims' wellbeing as well as to increase the possibility for them to actively seek interventions and effective coping strategies. McLoughlin et al.'s (2018) findings may imply that an increase in positive social interactions among cyberbully victims could potentially reduce and help buffer victims from the risks and harms brought by the bullies.

## Limitations

Several limitations should be addressed for this study. Similar to all of the studies involving analysis over textual contents in cyberspace, the authenticity of the contents would always remain problematic. Particularly, it should be noticed that some controversial posts exist within the online community, especially arguments between users over the "victim" and "bully" identity. The following exchange served as an example of a controversial post where authenticity of the story may be hard to verify.

**User BB:** … I'm being victim of a cyberbullier during my live sessions by a specific streamer growing his community around that kind of stuff.

**User CC:** Wow cyberbullying you really? Ok well let's tell everyone the truth on how you started the hole thing by talking shit with your mods about a viewer that supported you 100% and how you started yo bring people's families into this …

**User BB:** You guys have been harassing me and the various communities gravitating around me since FOUR WEEKS, you've been triggering periodically these guys unwarrently and you've been pushing your luck more than enought.

**User CC:** … I don't know how you are still lie about what you did you told her[9] sorry for talking shit about her so if you did nothing why tell her sorry?

To address this issue, I have decided to rely heavily upon the authors of the posts; full trust was given to users in *Cyberbullying* subreddit. This decision was made based on research findings in Moore, Nakano, Enomoto, and Suda's (2012) study about distinguishing bullies and victims from anonymous posts. As reported by Moore et al. (2012), cyberbullies are more likely to remain anonymous throughout the cyberbully process, whereas victims are more likely to expose their personal details. With recognition that the majority of the members within the subreddit have provided some level of personal-identifying information, the accuracy of the stories should therefore be genuine and the data should be trusted.

It is also important to acknowledge the limitation of the data collection technique being used in the current study. During the process, all of the posts and comments in *Cyberbullying* subreddit were manually exported into Word documents; without using computerized techniques to automatically export all data and apply filters to remove unnecessary information, researcher fatigue is therefore a rising issue. Moreover, the slow process of data collection accompanying with fatigue might result in difficulties expanding on the concepts that I have discovered in the current study. Therefore, it is recommended that researchers use automated data collection methods and apply techniques to reduce the time used for data collection in future studies to enhance the efficiency and validity of the results.

## Future Research

Notwithstanding the above limitations, this study has contributed new information in findings from previous literature. While both literature and current study results have suggested potential benefits of online social interaction between cyberbully victims, I propose that future research could be done to study those positive factors brought by technology. More in-depth studies could be designed to discover the benefits of online support groups in reducing the harms done by cyberbullies. Additionally, similar research could also be used to inform policy to include a more specific and inclusive definition of cyberbullying behavior. As current findings acknowledged cyberbullying victims' pessimistic view about current cybercrime-related policies and law enforcement's response to cyberbullying, amendments to existing definitions, policies, and laws in related topics should be considered. Furthermore, models and strategies to monitor

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[9] Based on the conversation, it has been assumed that User CC is defending for a friend who may have been cyberbullied by User BB.

aggressive messages within cyberspace, as well as establishment of preventative measures and policies to stop cyberbullying is also recommended.

In summary, the current study was able to provide some insight about the positive and negative consequences cyberbullying victims received through a thematic content analysis over *Cyberbullying* subreddit. Particularly, the findings indicated the complexity of cyberbullying behavior and difficulties for victims to overcome the traumatic experiences. Recommendations for future research and policy implications were provided based on the findings uncovered from this data set.

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# Don't Sugarcoat It: An Analysis of Sugar Dating Culture on Reddit

## Raven Lam

**Abstract.** Women engaged in sex work are traditionally represented as being a stain on society and in need to be fixing or protection. The emergence of a new type of sex work – being someone's sugar baby -- challenges those traditional beliefs. Sugar babies are a cross between a girlfriend or boyfriend and an escort. Much of what we know about them comes from the media or by users on Reddit. By drawing on the content of the popular SugarLifestyle Reddit forum, this research explores the lived experiences and perceptions of the participants. In particular, this study seeks to determine whether sugar babies articulate shared motivations; how they navigate sugar dating blurring or a traditional relationship and sex work; and what potential issues arise from their sugar dating experiences.

## Defining Sugar Dating

Sex work generally has a broad spectrum encompassing various types of sex work and profit (TED, 2014). Types of sex work range from exotic dancers to street-based sex workers who typically engage in unprotected sex with multiple clients (TED, 2014). A continuum is involved with each style of sex work ranging from full choice, where women have complete control in entering sex work, to limited choice, where external factors compel an individual to enter into sex work (TED, 2014). External factors contributing to sex work involvement include needing to make rent, paying bills, feeding children, or for purchasing illicit substances (Chon, 2015; Meulen, Durisin & Love, 2013). Sugar dating, a new sex work phenomenon, has had the same controversies as other forms of sex work. Sugar dating is a unique blend of the continuum in which it is a person's choice to enter into the profession due to external factors.

Sugar dating is defined as a halfway point between being a girlfriend/boyfriend and an escort, involving an arrangement of companionship in exchange for financial compensation (Cordero, 2015; Miller, 2011; Motyl, 2012). Generally sugar dating involves a sugar daddy or mommy who has the financial means to support a sugar baby or babies (Cordero, 2015; Miller, 2011; Motyl, 2012). Financial means is an allowance which can range anywhere from $2000.00USD to $5,000.00USD a month (Cordero, 2015; Miller, 2011; Motyl, 2012). In addition to an allowance, sugar daddies or mommies tend to buy their sugar babies lavish high-end gifts, first class flights to various destinations, and/or shopping sprees (Cordero, 2015; Miller, 2011; Motyl, 2012).

## Defining Sugar Babies

A sugar baby is defined as someone, usually a university student, who needs financial support for school, rent, and various other expenses in exchange for a financial allowance (Cordero, 2015; Miller, 2011; Motyl, 2012). A sugar baby goes on dates, and most likely engages in sexual

behaviour and intercourse with their sugar daddy or mommy (Cordero, 2015; Miller, 2011; Motyl, 2012). Some sugar babies also expect a lavish lifestyle when they obtain a sugar daddy (Miller, 2011; Motyl, 2013).

The definition of a sugar baby is quite different when being defined by those who are actively involved in sugar dating. According to SeekingArrangements.com (SA), a popular sugar dating site, a sugar baby is an empowered individual with "exquisite taste and an appetite for a relationship filled with new experiences and a taste of the good life" (SeekingArrangement, 2020). The website also explains the four main reasons to be a sugar baby: (1) goal driven dating which is emphasized as building a relationship on your terms and fulfilling your needs and goals; (2) college bound, which caters to the needs of attractive students who do not need to worry about tuition or bills; (3) the third focuses on sugar dating being a modern relationship that still has traditional values; and (4) empowered dating, which promotes sugar babies setting a higher standard for their dating life, focusing on wealth, honesty and fairness (SeekingArrangement, 2020). The goal of positively defining sugar babies is to differentiate between sugar dating and other forms of sex work (SeekingArrangement, 2020). Although SA does not explicitly advertise sex work, there are underlying narratives spoken by those involved in sugar dating that shows they consider sugar dating as sex work (Cordero, 2015; Miller, 2011; Motyl, 2012).

Sugar babies tend to be defined in the same way as escorts: someone who is paid for a single date and is generally paid by the hour (Miller, 2011; Motyl, 2013). Escorts have a system in which each request the client has, has a cost (Miller, 2011; Motyl, 2013). For example, the average cost of going out for dinner one time is $650.00USD; adding sexual favours increases the average cost up to $1500.00USD (Miller, 2011; Motyl, 2013). This differs for sugar babies who only receive the allowance plus gifts that were initially agreed upon, on a monthly basis (Miller, 2011; Motyl, 2013). The main difference between escorts and sugar babies is the relationship to their client. Sugar babies take the time to cultivate a relationship between themselves and their sugar daddy or mommy; whereas, escorts are transactional and there is no personal relationship development over time (Miller, 2011; Motyl, 2013). This definition is the one that will be used during this study as it is the main definition other literature follows.

The concept of a sugar baby is not new as it is similar to how marriages were arranged historically where money, intimacy and duties within a romantic context were discussed and expected to be upheld. In a modern context, sugar dating is similar to traditional dating in which both parties agree to be in a relationship and both parties contribute resources, intimacy, and expectations.  However, sugar dating has the asymmetrical expectation of intimacy and financial allowance which are agreed upon at the outset of the relationship (Miller, 2011; Motyl, 2013; Nelson, 1993). Although sugar dating is a voluntary, consensual and specific lifestyle, it is met with a lot of hostility, prejudice, and judgment.

## Media Perceptions

The media tend to paint a negative picture of sugar dating as they tend to focus on the stigma and stereotypes of sugar dating. Media portray sugar dating with an individual, generally

female, who has no morals and is manipulative and greedy, who will only sleep with wealthy men for money and high-end products (O'Donnell, 2018). Media outlets, such as BBC or HuffingtonPost, tend to take an abolitionist perspective on the sugar dating phenomenon. Abolitionist ideologies of sex work emphasize that women engaged in any sort of sex work, experience high rates of violence at the hands of men, and are sexually exploited and deemed as victims in need of rescuing (Jefferys, 2004; Meulen, 2011; Millet, 1990; Sanders & Brents, 2017 Raymond, 1998; Weitzer, 2005). The media tends to draw conclusions from worst-case scenarios and generalize these adverse experiences as universal amongst women engaged in various types of sex work (Meulen, 2011; Weitzer, 2005) In terms of sugar babies, the general perspective is that young, inexperienced women go on websites, such as SA, without fully understanding the underlying expectations of sex (O'Donnell, 2018). This idea is further lodged when media outlets have depictions of polarizing images of women being forced and/or coerced into having sex for large sums of money; they promote that sugar dating has a false sense of financial and emotional security (Meulen, Durisin, & Love, 2013;Miller-Young, 2014; Sanders & Hardy, 2015; O'Donnell, 2018;). In order to understand the sugar baby phenomenon, we must hear first-hand accounts of what the lifestyle entails, instead of taking what the media states at face value.

## Data and Methods

The data for this study came from https://www.reddit.com/r/sugarlifestyleforum/. Reddit is an online platform that allows people to join the over 130,000 active communities (subreddits) and 430,000,000 active users in conversations about various topics (Reddit, 2019). Subreddits are smaller communities within a forum used to ask and reply to specific questions. For this research, subreddits in the 'SugarLifestyle forum' were used in order to analyze the sugar dating culture portrayed by active sugar babies. The posts on Reddit were sorted by using the "Top" tab which sorts the posts from having the greatest number of votes to the lowest. The top voted posts on Reddit are the ones users have the most interest in discussing and generally have a larger number of replies/comments attached to the thread. Using only the top voted posts was useful in filtering out irrelevant posts that did not discuss the sugar baby lifestyle, which is supported by the users voting for the most relevant post.

I collected the top 50 posts in the forum and saved them in a Word document. All 50 posts were read and those that were only sugar babies who were students talking about their personal experiences were kept. In total, 14 posts were analyzed. Posts about sugar daddies and mommies sharing their experiences, were rejected from this study. The 14 posts were then converted from a Word document to a PDF and saved in NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software.

Data analysis was conducted using an open to focused coding scheme. The purpose of the coding scheme is to uncover all themes relevant to the study. At the start of the analysis, I used open coding that created numerous codes, which were eventually narrowed down to a smaller number of relevant codes (Palys & Atchison, 2013). Relevant terms and phrases reflecting sugar babies' lived experiences were highlighted in terms of opinions, themes, and personal definitions.

The process of coding can be tedious and repetitive; however, this process is necessary in order to reduce the data to smaller, manageable codes (Palys & Atchison, 2013). Five rounds of coding were completed. The first round involved discarding irrelevant posts. Fourteen out of the original 50 posts were kept, comprising a total sample of 1,623 comments. In the second and third round of coding, 34 codes were created; these were narrowed down in the fourth round to 27 codes. In the last round, codes were distilled into four themes.

Themes were created by grouping codes into relevant categories. Some themes were also created due to a particular phrase being used to describe a part of the sugar babies' experience. For example, the theme of "Emotional Labour" came up multiple times and was a phrase directly used in these threads.

When discussing the results, I have assigned each user a pseudonym. The names for the users were picked from a Google search of the top 20 gender neutral baby names (e.g., Robin, Charlie, etc.) in order to protect their original username. This was due to only a few threads stating they made throw-away accounts for the thread; other threads had their original accounts, and some had the same username as their SA username. I will acknowledge I will be using direct quotes from the threads; however, I will not be divulging the names of these threads in order to maintain anonymity. Some usernames contain identifying information about the location or. Institutions these sugar babies are involved with, therefore it is important to provide as much anonymity as I can.

## Researcher Perspective

Due to researching sugar babies in the past, I knew what I needed to look for in the threads in order to obtain the best results. This was also helpful when it came to coding the data and placing them into themes. Throughout my research, I knew there would be threads, comments, and opinions that did not agree with my own personal views on sex work and the sugar baby lifestyle. A technique that helped me move on from the frustration I was feeling while reading comments that had negative and judgmental views, was memoing. Memoing is a technique that allows the researcher to write a memo about an observation and our insights on it (Palys & Atchinson, 2013). This also helped me re-visit certain comments that had data relevant to the theme I was exploring.

## Results

The members of the subreddit were mostly from North America. This was proven by users having their state or province in their username or mentioning the school or area they lived around or near. However, it is important to note that not all users were open to sharing identifying information about their location or about themselves.

Overall, users were quite positive about their experiences being a sugar baby; however, there were hints of self-judgment and fear when it came to debating if sugar dating was prostitution or not. Many of the Reddit commenters used common sense and proper reasoning to engage with the original poster, however there were a few comments mentioning how "disgusting"

and "degrading" the sugar dating lifestyle is. Four main themes emerged from the data: "Economic Advantage", "Emotional Labour", "Fear of Judgment" and "Is This Prostitution?".

## Theme 1: Economic Advantage

The first theme involves details about what the income given to sugar babies from their sugar daddies goes towards. 647 people asked what they did with the money and how much they got paid. Two sub-themes emerged from this data "Student Debt" and "Tier System"

### *Student Debt*

 Users stated that their allowance goes towards paying their student fees, student loans, textbooks, and school supplies. If there is money left over then users occasionally purchase high end/name-brand items such as Chanel bags or Christian Louboutin shoes. Many users also indicated that financial stress from school was the main reason they joined websites like SA. As user Charlie states:

> I planned on being a sugar baby once I turned eighteen, it was only to pay for college and to pay for an apartment for myself to live in. Now I am in medical school and now have two sugar daddies paying for it and the apartment I live in [...] it just helps take some of the stress off you, ya know?

Users were quick to agree about how much relief they received when they had a sugar daddy taking care of them financially. Users from the United States and Canada, described their financial stress prior to being a sugar baby; User Skyler broke down the statistics:

> My family is middle class, but I feel super guilty when asking my parents for money. Hence why I actually went on Seeking Arrangements. I am doing my degree in Math in Canada and finding a job out here is tough![...] My student debt was through the roof! The total cost of my degree (4 years) is around $29,000, including things like textbooks and stuff. There is no way I want to be stuck with that kinda debt.

Both users explain why having a sugar baby is popular among students. It takes a large amount of stress off of them. In Canada especially, the cost of post-secondary tuition has risen by 40% in the past decade (Statistics Canada, 2016). However, despite the numerous explanations given by users, there were negative comments made about "getting a real job." User Sidney argued, "just because you're too lazy to get a job doesn't make what you're doing right. Grow the fuck up and get normal ass job." User Taylor disagreed and stated, "This is a real job! Just because it isn't what you would do, doesn't take away from the fact that there is work being put in." Another user described other "normal" jobs that equally sexualize women but are deemed acceptable. User Rae stated, "So you'd rather have me get a job that sexualizes me for less pay? Like a waitress? Where I would be required to dress more suggestively and provocatively just to gain more tips from gross men? No thanks.'. Multiple users defended the fact that they would have more financially secured futures when they decided to end their relationship with their sugar daddy, compared to those who have massive amounts of student debt to pay off. What this results in is women taking back control of their bodies and using it to push their goals.

A tier system is used for sugar babies to state their prices at the outset of their relationship with their sugar daddy. This system is generally effective at deterring those who are trying to scam sugar babies. This is due to having the prices available and money being sent prior to meeting so that sugar babies can be properly paid. User Alex describes the tier system best,

> "The system I was introduced to and I like the best is with tiers. Tier is when you have a fixed price for things you want to do and not all of it has to be sexual! My first set was all non-sexual and my sugar daddy was okay with that! I have my price list saved and it goes like this: Tier 1-$500 for going out for dinner, Tier 2- $1200 for spending the night and hanging out and finally Tier 3- $1500-2500 for anything sexual. It took me a while to find a sugar daddy who want to spend that kinda cash, since my prices are fixed, but hey it worked for me! Bonus is that so many scammers didn't respond to me like they usually do. Personally this system deters a lot of the losers who just want a nude from you."

Users agreed on how this system helps them find legitimate sugar daddies who can support them financially this way. Many users mentioned how they felt weird at first asking for money but eventually learned they had to ask for a reasonable amount up front in order to avoid those who would use them and leave. There were other pay/tier systems discussed, though the overwhelming majority had a system similar to user Alex.

## Theme 2: Emotional Labour

Sugar babies shared a unique trait that they had to develop once they had a sugar daddy and that is the ability to create publicly observable facial and body features. This brings attention to how sugar babies are supposed to act in public and how they manage their feelings in order to create a specific emotional state while with their sugar daddy. User Jordan answers a question about "what is it really like"

> This is what emotional labour is for us. Like with anything, it is a mixed bag. You get some good stuff if you're smart about, like with anything else. [...] I had this one sugar daddy who I saw maybe a couple of times a month (business man, super busy) and every time we met up, he would want to go to the fanciest places for dinner. I was 24 years old and he was about 45, and every time we went out, I always got these stares of judgment. At first I didn't mind but as it kept happening it took a toll on my mental health. I had to keep faking this happy person in order for him to feel good and he didn't really care how I felt. [...] needless to say I ended that relationship and have a better sugar daddy now.

From this perspective, sugar babies can be seen as faking their feelings and overall relationship in order to gain monetary and materialistic items. However, there was some agreement that this is just part of the lifestyle and not everyone is going to understand it. Many of them also mentioned the same toll it took on their mental health. The stares, the whispers, having waitresses make snarky comments in front of the sugar baby. Sugar babies within this forum

are often portrayed as these strong women who don't care what others think about their choices, when in reality, they have the same human emotions as the rest of society.

Emotional labour is seen as something that not many sugar babies talk about or knew about going into sugar dating. There were several users who stated that it was their first time hearing the term "emotional labour" but it was a term that they felt a connection with. This is due to the lack of conversation around the mental health of those who choose to enter this lifestyle. User Shay further explains how their mental health changed:

> "It is just hard, you know? I gotta put on this show that I like being seen with this old dude in public. At first I didn't give a shit but you hear enough negativity over your choices and something inside you just breaks. I had to get a therapist (sugar daddy kindly paid for) in order to sort out my feelings. I developed a social anxiety disorder and I struggle to go out now, even just by myself. No one talks about this shit. It is real. This is what can happen and it has to so many of us."

This was one of the first times where the dark side of sugar dating came to light. Many users expressed feelings of depression and self-hatred when it came to describing their own experiences with sugar dating. For some, even after ending the relationship the mental toll it took was too great and they are still in therapy to reverse some of the damage. There were multiple negative comments with this thread that went along the lines of "well, what do you think would happen" and "you deserve it." There was no defence from the original poster or other users when it came to comments like that.

## Theme 3: Fear of Judgment

Users expressed how they felt when they went to places alone; places that were also frequented by them and their sugar daddy. Commenters portrayed these situations as demeaning and demoralizing due to feeling the knowing stares of people who saw them together. However, judgment came from other sources as well, such family members and friends. Many asked questions about whether anyone close to the sugar babies knew about their lifestyle. User Lennox explained:

> "I try to stay the hell away from places me and my sugar daddy visited. I have had enough of the restaurant staff looking so judgy at me. I once had this man at a Starbucks I went to, ask me if I was paying for my drink myself because I didn't put out last night and then started laughing. I grabbed my drink and ran out of there in tears. I am just a person paying for school in a different way. These experiences are seriously making me question continuing on with this."

These negative feelings of judgment and potentially wanting to quit was a consistent theme across many threads in the SugarLifestyle forum. Complaints about how hard it was to find a decent support system that didn't judge them for the choices they made rang true for many people. User Ali elaborates on the lack of support,

> " I have had both good and bad experiences with telling people about my lifestyle. I told my sister and brother who were both super supportive and respected my choices. When

I told my best friend, she flipped out on me and said I whored myself out for money and that I was a dirty slut. This is a girl I have known for over 15 years and it was thrown away over a choice I made. I am so cautious around my other friends now. I have become so picky to where my sugar daddy and I go out to. I am terrified to run into someone I know and have to explain myself."

The negative commenters within a few of these threads cited many news articles that point towards how being a sugar baby is just asking for social isolation. Some users had multiple paragraphs explaining why they thought sugar babies should feel judged for their actions because it does not agree with the rest of society. Negative commenters wanted to feel justified when explaining that they are allowed to make derogatory comments; "I have every right to judge your choices" "It's a free world, get over it" were some of the more common comments made.

## Theme 4: Is This Prostitution?

This theme had the most debates within it, mostly among sugar babies themselves who argue how they see themselves in their profession. Many users felt that their profession differed from "traditional" forms of sex work, such as street-based prostitution. Some sugar babies did not want to believe that they were on the same platform as street-based sex workers. User Monroe details on what users believe the difference is,

"Why put me into the same camp as prostitutes? Let me tell you that I am nothing like them. I rarely have sex with my sugar daddy, it is only when I feel like it, then he can have sex with me. Most of the time we are out chilling and hanging out like a normal ass couple. A relationship like this is supposed to be MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL. Not that one party gets their way, and that's that. Fuck that. This arrangement does not excuse him from asking my consent on things. That is the difference between my work and a prostitute's work."

This view on sugar babies and prostitution caused an uproar in the comments section. There was a good mix of those who agreed with this user and those who did not. Many of those who agreed with this comment spoke on the aspect of consent in sex work; stating those who have been pimped out and forced into human trafficking did not consent to that, which makes it vastly different form sugar dating. Some commenters thought about how logical and sound their perspectives were due to other commenters bringing them positive comments on how "they are so right" about prostitution and sugar dating.

However, there were users who were quick to point out that prostitution does not have to have a degree of violence for it to be considered prostitution. Some users stated how they knew it was similar to prostitution going into this lifestyle, while others mentioned how they quickly realized sugar dating and prostitution are one and the same. User Indigo shared her thoughts on why being a sugar baby is a type of sex work similar to prostitution,

"I love being a sugar baby first and foremost. I do admit when I first signed up, I was naive and had no idea what I was really getting myself into, but I got lucky and had guidance from my first sugar daddy on what to do and how to negotiate prices. I also

learned as I went through multiple sugar daddies and a few sugar mommies, that I am like a prostitute. I am in a more fortunate place where I am not out on the street doing this, accepting whatever man comes my way, but I do have sex with men for money. I use the money for my own needs and often I have more than one sugar daddy. I call myself a prostitute and I am proud of it"

This thread was one of the most contentious threads, as it also had many users either agree or disagree with the original poster. Some users felt they needed to "talk some sense" into the original poster by replying to the thread with multiple paragraphs. Much of these paragraphs spoke on how prostitution goes against the values in our society, that God is willing to forgive them if they give up this kind of lifestyle, and how would their mother feel if the original poster said that to her. Other users showed their support by agreeing with the post. User Jamie replied back to negative comments by stating, "...this is their body, their choice and their life. Let them be, it doesn't affect your life and no one is forcing you into this lifestyle." This further highlight's that regardless of the side someone takes, there will always be an argument.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The amount of time for this research to take place only allowed for a small number of threads and comments to be analyzed. The process of retrieving data and placing it into a Word Doc, took a considerable amount of time as each comment and thread post had to be individually moved, otherwise the format would be skewed. Future research could delve deeper into the comments and threads of a multitude of posts in order to paint a better picture on the sugar baby lifestyle.

I also want to acknowledge that it is not possible to identify bots who are posing as a human being or if the negative commenters are only commenting to stir up controversies within the threads. Reddit provides anonymity that allows users to express their beliefs without backlash (Amaya et al., 2019). However, this anonymity can backfire when "troll" accounts are made. "Trolls" are users who purposefully make egregious statements about a topic in order to get a reaction out of commenters in the thread (Amaya et al., 2019). The issue with this is that controversial topics such as sugar dating and sugar babies attract "trolls" and there is no way to discern who is genuinely making a critical statement or who is a "troll."

The themes found within my research reflect the choice to become a sugar baby is entirely voluntary. There may be outside factors that accelerate this choice, but coercion is not one of them; this finding is consistent with current literature (Miller, 2011; Motyl, 2013; Nelson, 1993). Sex work, as considered by some sugar babies within this lifestlye, is no longer seen as a way for men to control women. Instead, this lifestyle is seen as empowering and allows for a better future as sugar babies are financially taken care of now (Miller, 2011; Motyl, 2013; Nelson, 1993)

It is not surprising that the sugar baby lifestyle is seen as emotionally draining and potentially harmful. Sugar babies expressed that while they enjoy some of the benefits of sugar dating, their mental state deteriorates from the hate that is spewed at them both in reality and Online.

These negative perceptions create toxic environments for sugar babies who are consenting to this lifestyle. Those who oppose sugar dating justify their ideologies through religious beliefs, deeming themselves as those superior to sugar babies and as rescuers of people trapped in "those types of situations".

There is also the issue of consent that arose from the data. There is not enough research done on the topic of sugar babies that explores the perceptions of sugar daddies and if they believe that they can technically purchase their sugar babies' consent. Future research could look at the expectations and perceptions sugar daddies have for themselves, as well as what they expect out of this mutually beneficial arrangement. Issues such as this should be addressed in order to educate sugar babies on what should be acceptable behaviour and refute misinformed beliefs about the expectations of sugar babies.

Sugar dating has also helped many Canadian students pay off their student debts (Logan, 2017; Wade; 2016). Instead of obtaining a socially acceptable job, such as waitressing that already sexualizes women, students are taking charge of their own bodies and finances by going on sugar dating websites, such as SA, in order to find a sugar daddy or mommy to take care of them (Logan, 2017; Wade; 2016). This raises an interesting issue of why some forms of socially acceptable work also involves the sexualization of women. Often, jobs in the service industry have men who inappropriately touch women without their consent and verbally abuse them. However, this is seen as acceptable compared to a sugar baby who is consensually in a relationship with her sugar daddy. Although many sugar babies may be unaware of what is actually expected of them in this type of arrangement, educational strategies that address the unique issues of sugar dating and encourage a pro-social conversation about sugar dating might be needed in order to minimize any potential harms.

Lastly, future research should delve into other sugar baby forums on Reddit in order to understand sugar dating and sugar babies as a whole. This research only looks at part of sugar dating and the perceptions put forth by sugar babies. There is little to no information on sugar daddies or mommies and their perceptions of the relationship. It would also be beneficial to see the gender ratio of sugar babies and what the male sugar babies' experiences are. Sugar Lifestyle forums have the opportunity to teach researchers more about this new phenomenon in order to both educate and protect those who enter this lifestyle, instead of demonizing them.

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# Business as Usual:
# A Thematic Content Analysis of the Online Sex Work Experience through the Clients' Lens and the Impact of the *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act*

**Andrea Reagan Wong**

**Abstract.** Abstract. Advances in technology have impacted major facets of the sex work industry by transforming advertising and screening practices conducted by sex workers. This current study was conducted in part due to the urgings of other researchers in the field calling for an examination of the migration of sex workers into the online platform and the process of this subset of the industry. Adopting a quasi-experimental design, 352 reviews from a popular sex worker review database were analyzed to identify key behaviours involved in the process of negotiating for sexual services, and if these behaviours have differed since the implementation of the *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act* (PCEPA) in December 2014. Findings indicate that the screening process was impacted. Additionally, there appeared to be less reliance on prior reviews of sex workers starting from 2015. The results also suggest that there were some changes in the purchasing experience that could warrant greater examination, including: the methods of communication and use of reviews experienced changes following the implementation of the PCEPA. The limitations discussed relate to the issues of using publicly available data, and interviews with sex workers are recommended for future research.

## Introduction

### Sex Work and Technology

The study of sex work in the social sciences has resulted in a wealth of literature available for review. Research has been conducted concerning indoor[1] and street-based work regarding the

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[1] When referencing "indoor sex work" the specific subset of sex workers being referred to are those who work in massage parlours, body rub parlours, and adult entertainment services that operate like any other business operating within a municipality.

effectiveness of different regulation strategies employed by federal and state governments, and rates of victimization (Cunningham & Shah, 2017; Dewey, 2018; Gertler & Shah, 2011; Hubbard & Colosi, 2013; Johnson & Matthews, 2016; Laing, 2012; Larsen, 1996; McCarthy, Benoit, Jansson, & Kolar, 2012). Additionally, there has been no shortage of research focusing primarily on the experiences of female sex workers, and the contentious debate regarding the interconnected nature of sex work and trafficking (Comte, 2014; Farley, 2003, 2005). There has also been research delving into the experiences of male sex workers (Bernstein, 2007; Logan, 2010; Minichiello & Scott, 2014), in addition to more studies that approach sex work as a multi-faceted experience that could encompass anything from services that offer intercourse to strip clubs and online "cam girl" options (Hubbard & Colosi, 2013; Parent & Bruckert, 2013). However, when discussing the topic of sex work, there has been a focus on street-based work, which has resulted in some gaps in the literature that have only been partially addressed.

In particular, the Internet has become an essential development for the sex work industry: sex workers now can screen clients, market services via advertisements, build up a solid professional reputation, and also set up meetings with clients (Bernstein, 2007; Cunningham & Kendall, 2011; Cunningham & Shah, 2017; Jones, 2015). Notably, there has been a recent transition of sex workers moving into the online platform. Cunningham and Kendall (2011) have found substantial streetwalker displacement within the sex worker population due to the decreased likelihood of arrest vis-à-vis the use of an online platform. There was also evidence of more workers moving into either online or indoor work as opposed to the riskier street-based option (Cunningham & Kendall, 2011). From the results compiled thus far, it appears that the proliferation of the use of the Internet to conduct business has greatly improved the safety of sex workers who choose to use this platform.

There has also been some literature that has examined the uses of a review website called TheEroticReview (TER) that has allowed for clients to post about their experiences with sex workers, and use advertising sites such as craigslist, Eros, or Backpage to find workers that suit their interests (Bernstein, 2007; Cunningham & Kendall, 2010a, 2010b, 2011). Overall, the findings indicate that the use of advertisement and review sites has led to significant benefits to callgirls and escorts due to the unique ability of the Internet to match clients and sex workers to ensure compatibility (Roberts, 2007). However, while there has been a discussion of the use of TER from a quantitative (in using the "services provided" and "costs for service" field on TER) and national perspective (based in the United States), no research has been conducted from both a more qualitative approach that better evaluates the content of the review. It also has yet to be investigated from a more localized basis that may more greatly inform on client and sex worker behaviour and whether it may differ across different cities or countries. Another gap in this subfield of literature identified is the lack of research examining how legal changes may influence the behaviours that have been seen thus far (Jones, 2015).

## The Legal Climate in Canada

In Canada, there has been a significant change to the criminal law pertaining to sex work as a result of *Canada (Attorney General) v. Bedford* (2013). At the time of the Supreme Court

decision, stakeholders who advocated strongly for decriminalization were hoping that the momentum of this case would carry forward in a direction that could aid in improving conditions for sex workers. This was not the case. The political climate in Canada shifted in 2014 with the implementation of the *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act* (from hereon known as the PCEPA), which introduced a bastardized form of the Nordic model that places more emphasis on arresting buyers (but not diminishing the ability to arrest sex workers) and replaced the previous Bill C-49 (known as the Communicating Law). As a result of *Canada (Attorney General) v. Bedford* (2013) where sections 210, 212(1)(j), and 213(1)(c) were struck down for being unconstitutional[2], new legislation was introduced in the form of the PCEPA. The new sections of the *Criminal Code* make it an offence for individuals to communicate with anyone for the purpose of obtaining sexual services (s. 286.1), to receive material benefit from the provision of sexual services (s. 286.2), to procure individuals for the purposes of offering or providing sexual services (s. 286.3), and to advertise their sexual services (s.286.4). These amendments have shifted the narrative from "the sex worker being a willing participant in the industry" to "sex worker as a victim in need of saving" (in that the sex worker was now a victim who requires a means to exit the market) (Lawrence, 2015). However, by still leaving the sex worker open to penalization, the increased risks towards the safety of sex workers as a result of adopting this model has been called into question.

A major concern among a specific subset of academics and sex workers who advocated extensively against the PCEPA was that it would have the unintentional impact of pushing sex workers and their ability to conduct negotiations underground, effectively eliminating the ability of sex workers to screen potential clients or hire protection (Chu & Glass, 2013; Lawrence, 2015; Benoit, Jansson, Smith, & Flagg, 2017). Due to the fears that the PCEPA would exacerbate the dangers to sex workers, there is also an interest in considering whether these same dangers may have permeated the world of online-based sex work as the focus in the literature on this specific topic has largely been on street-based sex workers. In addition, as the number of online-based sex workers is now growing, it is essential to put them at the forefront of investigation so as not to leave them behind.

In her review of past studies regarding the evolution of the sex work industry, Jones (2015) suggested the exploration of local contexts and how they may influence the migration of workers into the online platform. That is what this qualitative study seeks to accomplish (to the extent of investigating behaviours in a specific locale). By firstly examining the process of acquiring sexual services from a sex worker who advertises online in Vancouver, British Columbia, that client-to-sex worker dynamic will be closely examined. Secondly, by examining whether the behaviours exhibited in negotiating sexual services found prior to the implementation of the PCEPA may have been impacted will address the issue of whether legal changes may have impacted client and sex worker behaviour so far. It was due to these objectives that the central research question was formed: how has the process of negotiating for sexual services through online means changed following the implementation of the PCEPA? To answer this question, a thematic content analysis was selected in order to best examine the

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[2] While the three sections were deemed unconstitutional, the striking down of the sections was delayed by one year in order to allow Parliament to provide replacement sections that would come in the form of the PCEPA.

online reviews, with the intent to examine how client-sex worker behaviours such as communication methods, use of prior reviews, and screening played out before the PCEPA. These behaviours will then be tracked after the PCEPA's implementation to examine if any changes in the client-sex worker dynamic exist.

## Methodology

### Data Collection and Analysis

For the purposes of this study, the data source selected was publicly accessible through TheEroticRevew.com, a database that allows clients to post reviews of sex workers and discuss their experiences with them on discussion boards. As the website essentially functions as a review site for sex workers, the focus of the study will be on the clients' experience with the sex workers that are registered providers on the database, whether that process has been impacted by recent legislative changes. This database was chosen as it was the easiest to access without having to create an account to view the reviews, and due to its notoriety within this subfield of research as being rich with data, but not having been fully utilized to examine its use in Canada. To capture this, 176 reviews of workers in Vancouver, BC, Canada that were dated between the 2011 to 2018 time period[3] were selected based on a criterion sampling method. I was interested in capturing the general climate of how the process of negotiating sex work could potentially experience changes, and if there would be any changes year-to-year. Due to this interest, 22 reviews were pulled from each year from 2011 to 2018, which were then filtered by content and quality of information so that each review would contribute to the analysis as opposed to being two or three lines that would not inform on the client and sex worker interaction.

As this current study is a quasi-experimental design, a comparison group (comprised of 176 reviews that were published within the same time period of 2011 to 2018 and collected via the same criterion sampling method) from Seattle, WA, USA was selected. Seattle was chosen as there were no significant changes in legislation[4] in that country during that same time period of 2011-2018, and acted as an apt proxy for the pre-test-post-test comparison as a result of the similar culture and predominantly democratic climate (from a political perspective). It also was selected due to it being the closest major metropolitan city geographically to Vancouver that was not within the same country, and from a demographic perspective has roughly the same size population and diversity. As the data source is publicly available, as per SFU Research Ethics Policy R20.01, this study did not require ethics review.

Based on the objectives of the study, a thematic content analysis was conducted to fully capture the process of screening, negotiation, and the overall experience of a client with a sex worker who operates from online platforms. Some main themes were found in the first round

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[3] This time period was selected as it gave an equal number of years both before and after the PCEPA received Royal Assent in November 2014 (*Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act*, 2014).

[4] Criminal law in the Washington state currently deems all forms of prostitution illegal as per Washington Revised Code Title 9A. Washington Criminal Code § 9.A:88.110, 9.A:88.030, 9A:88.060, 9A:88.70, 9A:88.080

of coding, and the second cycle yielded several key findings essential to the pre-test and post-test comparison. As the objective was to examine the impact of the PCEPA on the online platform, a hypothesis that was established before analyzing the data was that there would be an increase in behaviours to avoid detection (such as a faster or non-existent screening process and fewer service requests outside of the worker's home).

## Results

After the data was exported into separate files for comparison, the documents were imported into the NVivo 12 Plus program. Both an inductive and deductive coding strategy was employed as the nature of the reviews covered a vast array of different topics, as there were a few key themes such as the booking, screening, and verification processes that I expected to be present based on the findings of other researchers (Bernstein, 2007; Cunningham & Kendall, 2011; Roberts, 2007). As a result, some of the codes in Table 1 emerged based on the frequency of specific recurring events that were seen whereas others were guided slightly by the common themes identified by previous researchers before analysis occurred. By the second cycle of coding the themes were refined and some of the emergent coding was "eliminated" based on the lower frequency of occurrence by being subsumed into the main themes that they were under. The same themes were found across both Vancouver and Seattle, however they differed in frequency of occurrence and the specific years that certain themes emerged (see Table 1).

Table 1: Primary Codes

| Code | References: | Split by City | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | Vancouver | Seattle |
| Initial Contact | 190 | 81 | 109 |
| Use of reviews and ads | 129 | 79 | 50 |
| Booking Process | 113 | 57 | 56 |
| Screen/Verification | 79 | 36 | 43 |
| Mitigated Risk | 43 | 24 | 19 |

## Methods of Communication

The initial contact between a client and a worker was mostly through email, with a total of 46 references across the 2011-2018 period. While there was a notable increase in the 2014 and 2015 period in Vancouver regarding email use, there was a dip in usage after 2017, after which texting and calling became more popular as the primary form of contact. Most clients reported using email in order to reach out to the worker through two popular advertisement sites: Tryst

or preferred411.[5] Some workers were reported to have an "email only" policy that was respected by the clients, but the majority of the reviews (87 total) indicated that email was the starting point of contact followed by texting when the screening process was completed. However, as some workers provided their phone number as well, a common subtheme among reviewers was the eventual use of texting or calling to reach out as there was a reported non-response from some workers.

As mentioned, email correspondence was used for the purposes of screening the clients, but also for starting a conversation that would break the ice, while also expressing any concerns for the planned setup or building to the eventual meeting:

> Sure enough she got in touch when she returned and we started a fun email exchange. I asked her what she would like me to bring for us to drink and she said she loves a good red wine so I brought a terrific bottle of Nickel and Nickel Cab to share w her (review 169, 2015).

The above example was one of many similar reviews that detail the use of secondary contact (either email or text) following the screening process as a method of creating anticipation and sexual tension (if indicated by the "fun email exchange") for the eventual transaction, with some clients also referring to the meeting as a "date" (e.g. review 208, 2011) and purchasing lavish gifts (such as wine, chocolates, or flowers) to present to their date[6] of the evening along with what was frequently referred to as "the donation" (review 120, 2011). For many of the clients, this extra touch was considered a courtesy that *should* be afforded, with this reviewer commenting: "treat her with gentlemanly respect and charm, and your efforts will come back at you tenfold" (review 104, 2015). As seen from this theme, there is an indication that the whole process of communicating with the sex worker before the face-to-face meeting is an unhurried process like what was found by Cunningham and Kendall (2011). More importantly, it points to the sex worker's usage of communication to verify the client's identity, a luxury that is not readily available to the street-based worker and what may determine life or death for individuals in this industry.

## The Importance of Client Reviews

The usage of reviews from previous clients was also prevalent. Many clients relied on reviews left by others in the community, as revealed in explicit references to factors that led to the booking of the worker. For example, one client had "just moved to the Pacific Northwest, and had a hankering to see what Vancouver had to offer. I found her on TER, and boy was I glad I did" (review 88, 2013). Another client noted that it was due to the number of stellar reviews left for a particular worker that he decided on reaching out to "partake" in the experience (review 201, 2013). On the other hand, a client stated that "mixed reviews made me hesitant,

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[5] There were also mentions of Backpage and craigslist prior to both being taken down, however that was only reflected in the older reviews, and even then references of what website was used were sporadic.
[6] TheEroticReview.com primarily hosted female sex workers, however there were some transgender workers that were denoted with the "TS" in front of the working names that they had chosen for themselves.

and her prices are a bit higher than what I normally pay" (review, 25, 2014), before going on to state that the experience was well worth the amount that was paid. This example highlighted the importance of prior reviews that would determine the likelihood that a reviewer would consider booking a worker. Due to the online nature of advertisements and the reviewing system, it is apparent that reputation is a major factor that determines the likelihood that the worker will make a substantial amount from this occupation. At the same time, the ability of a worker and client to match based on compatibility (the client using the reviews to determine if he or she would be satisfied with the particular worker) reveals a greater amount of planning that contributes to a successful and safe transaction process. This reviewer stated:

> Happened to be in Vancouver for a business trip and decided to indulge myself. Found Selena with some decent reviews on a different board and seemed promising. There were talks about how she can be flakey and hard to reach if you're not a regular but I did experience that. Contacted her via phone and she responded promptly. Send me the approximate location and had me contact her again once I was at the crossroads. Sent the exact location and buzz-in # to my phone. It was a clean, up-scale, private apartment located in downtown. Knocked on the door and a beautiful latina woman greeted me in black lingerie (review 55, 2016).

From what could be gathered from the nature of the reviews, it is evident that clients using the review posts from other clients was a method of ensuring compatibility (in relation to what the client considers attractive as seen in the above review) with potential sex workers and that they would actually show up for the appointment, as opposed to using it as a method of screening.

## Client Satisfaction with the Booking Process

Generally, clients in both Vancouver and Seattle expressed satisfaction with the booking process. Across all 170 reviews, 113 expressed general consensus on the satisfaction with scheduling, and very few clients showing dissatisfaction with how the workers handled setups. One reviewer stated that there was "a bit of uncertainty on my schedule made the specifics of our date hard to pin down, but she remained quite flexible so even though I was a difficult client to confirm, the setup was easy and convenient" (review 207, 2011). Other clients stated that the booking process was made easier by booking in advance, with many of the workers being quite flexible and selecting dates that would best benefit the client (e.g. review 27, 2013). However, while the majority of reviews were positive, there were a few reviews that expressed mildly dissatisfied experiences such as this client, who stated "she gave me a bit of a run around and made me wait about 15 min before she gave me her room number" (review 244, 2014). For the most part however, the booking process was made relatively easier because of the online platform that allowed for either emailing or texting once initial contact was made, and both the clients and the workers exhibited a willingness to work around each other's schedules to reach a mutually beneficial agreement.

## Self-Preservation Behaviours

Another recurring theme was that of self-preservation behaviours that both clients and workers exhibited through a review of the data. In several instances, the worker would first take several steps (as described in the next section) to ensure that the client would not be a danger to their well-being. At the same time, the client's usage of reviews was a similar attempt to avoid detection from law enforcement. In addition to the caution taken during the initial point of contact, both parties were diligent about being as discrete as possible. These two concepts were divided into subthemes and discussed in greater detail below.

### *Risk Mitigation*

One particular theme that was identified almost immediately in the coding process (simply due to a randomized order of reviewing the data) was that of risk mitigation in cases where the sex worker and the client employed specific strategies to avoid detection such as the following excerpt: "she knew the hotel well and that I would have to meet her downstairs due to elevator keys. She even told me she would walk thru the lobby to the 2nd floor so it was less obvious" (review 169, 2015).

Another tactic that was commonly seen were more discrete behaviours that would assist them in maintaining the clandestine nature of the transaction, such as their outfit choices and initial meeting locations:

> I had asked her to dress casually and she was perfectly attired in a casual top and jeans. We had a few laughs in the elevator and the hallway, and I knew this was going to be a good morning (review 192, 2014).

This client was one of many who made a specific request regarding the outfit choices of the worker, and while this was an example of wanting her to dress in a more casual attire, there were other reviewers who requested that the worker dress professionally so as to come across as a business partner or client: "I met her the next day - she is very careful and meets you at a public location near her incall apartment. After that you drive after her and she takes you to her apartment" (review 175, 2012).

The worker in this example practiced more discrete patterns of behaviour. In subsequent reviews for the same worker there were notably similar interactions with other clients where she requested that the entire process leading up to the transaction be discrete. Other workers have set out to mask the nature of the meeting with other methods, such as exhibiting overtly friendly and familiar behaviours with their clients in order to come across as having a relation beyond that of being in a client-worker service role. Whether this was to avoid appearing suspicious to law enforcement or to avoid the social stigmas attached to sex work was not apparent, however from the tone in reviews 175 and 192, there seemed to be an equal interest on both the client and the sex worker's part in wanting to escape detection. For example, the worker in 175 exhibited cautious behaviour in requesting a meeting at a public location before driving the client to her apartment as opposed to the likelihood of instead having several clients

parking near her apartment or engaging in other behaviours that may appear suspicious to neighbours or law enforcement agencies.

### *Screening Procedures*

The screening process for online workers should also be highlighted. In the reviews there were several occurrences where there was a reference check that was conducted by the worker in order to verify that the client actually was a client. The process appeared to involve the client providing the worker with the contact information of a worker that he or she had seen for services in the past, with the purposes of confirming that the client was a good buyer.

> She asked for references from SP's whom I have met and seen recently so I provided names of three very nice ladies whom I have also had the pleasure of spending time with over the past few months. I am not a member of preferred411 so it was fortunate that those ladies spoke up for me (thank you!) (review 184, 2013).

In the above example, the client was fortunate enough to have three workers to vouch for him, however there were also instances where the client was relatively new to the process (though claiming to be a "long-time lurker" of TER) and didn't have a worker to act as a reference. In one such case, the worker depended on a phone call and a thorough examination of the client's LinkedIn profile to verify his identity:

> This was my first time to try this out and I zeroed on her because of the reviews. I did not know how the system worked so I decided to be honest and sent an email to her and she promptly responded asking me to prove my authenticity. Surprisingly it ended up in me providing my linked-in profile and I was nervous, but still took the chance (review 156, 2013).

This example was on the more extreme side of the results however, as the majority of the reviewers were relatively more experienced in the online sex work platforms and had references readily available (e.g. review 202, 2012), which was also found in other investigations of client and sex worker behaviour (Cunningham & Kendall, 2011).

There was also some minor variation in terms of the screening and verification process in terms of how complicated it was. For the most part, the screening process was reported to be a long process but generally perceived to be quite painless and "worth the wait" (e.g. review 188, 2012). Yet there were some reviews that reported a relatively simple verification due to some key factors. Firstly, the workers who were reviewed as having easy, two-step screening were either part of an agency (in which case the verification was handled by the agency itself), or felt experienced enough to gauge the validity of the client through a quick phone call (e.g. review 85, 2014). A second factor that made the review process more streamlined was the worker's use of an assistant to screen for them (review 245, 2018). Otherwise, the process was generally made easier if the prospective client went through a verification service or if they had prior experience with the screening procedure.

## The Impact of the PCEPA

In selecting Seattle, due to the legal dynamic in Washington being more in-line with how the PCEPA has now changed the enforcement of sex work offences, it was expected that there would be a transition for Vancouver's reviews post PCEPA to appear similar in tone, content, and description of the negotiation. One of the distinguishing elements of reviews from Seattle were what was commonly referred to as a "two-call system" (wherein contact following screening is initiated via an initial phone call to clarify the specific expectations for the transaction, and a second call on the day of to confirm location and time) that was unofficially in place among the client-sex worker community so as to streamline negotiation. For example:

> Scheduling was easy and painless - she was very responsive until we found a time that worked for both of us. Arrived at a really nice 4 star hotel. Typical two call system. Upon opening the door I met her - she is definitely the girl in the pictures and looks even better in person (review 83, 2016).

In Vancouver this level of sophistication was not seen either before or after the PCEPA was implemented. Additionally, there was also a decline in the overall quality in terms of the details provided in reviews from Vancouver following 2015 and going through to 2018, where the content was more limited in relation to what was discussed. For example, this reviewer simply writes:

> Finally getting to the review. She is gorgeous (although very made up - just not my style as it turns out). Some of the services seemed robotic but overall I had fun. She is a lovely woman, we just didn't have a great connection (review 10, 2018).

Compared to the reviews from Seattle, which were virtually unchanged, there was a noted brevity in the tone and general quality of Vancouver reviews seen after the PCEPA. Regardless of the length and quality of the reviews however, the key themes that were found (methods of communication, use of reviews, and screening and mitigation) and the location of the transaction were still present and useful as points of comparison in light of the legislative shakeup in Canada that brings the criminal law more closely in-line with Washington criminal law.

Regarding **methods of communication**, there was a notable dip in texting and calling in 2015 and a preference for email as a point of contact (Figure 1). By 2017 texting and calling gradually started to increase in occurrence; this eventual return to the use of phones could be due to a better understanding of how police agencies were enforcing the PCEPA. As email was likely considered a more secure method of communication, its usage during the initial years of uncertainty would appear to be consistent with potential fears from clients and workers on how the PCEPA would be enforced, with the return to calling and texting an indication of a better understanding of how the new sections were being enforced.
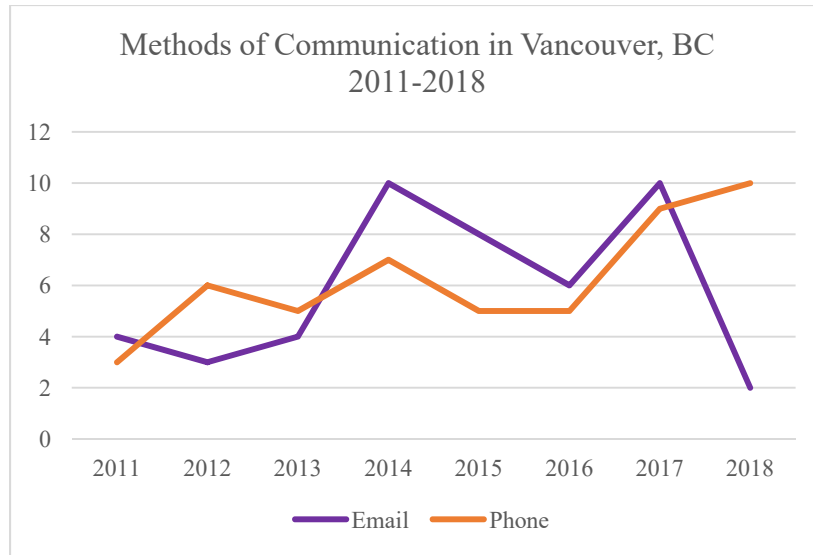
Figure 1: Methods of Communication


For the second variable (use of prior reviews before deciding to contact a sex worker), there was a tendency of clients **using reviews** from other clients as a reasoning to select a worker before 2015. After 2015 there was a lower number of reviews referencing other clients' experiences, and though it would increase slightly in 2016, by 2017 that frequency would begin to decline again (see Figure 2). Comparatively, in Seattle there was a gradual decline that can be seen in Figure 2, followed by a slow transition upwards in 2018.
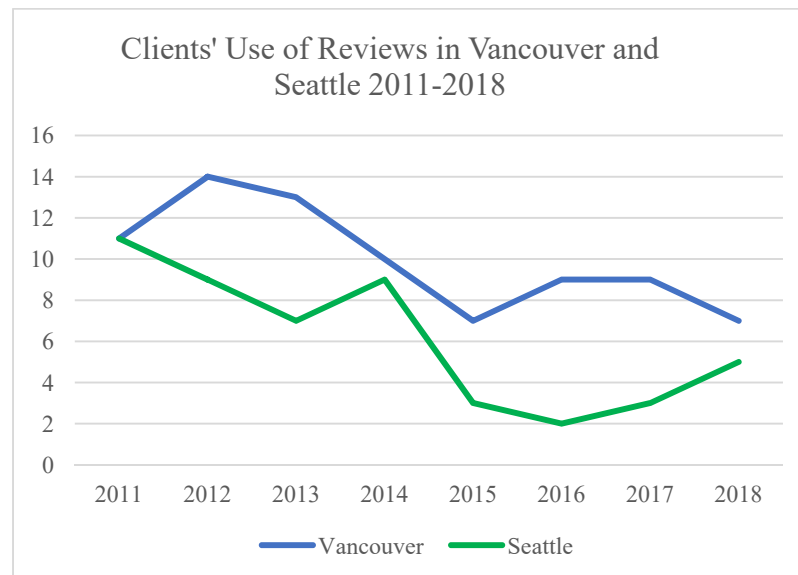


Figure 2: Use of Reviews

Mentions of the **screening process** in reviews experienced a gradual decline that by 2014 became static across 2014 to 2017 and plummeted even more in 2018 (see Figure 3). This variable appeared to have been on a decline before the implementation of the PCEPA, and thus it is debatable if the "test" had any impact on the frequency seen. However, the year that the decline began (2013) is when *Bedford* was decided, and as there was significant uncertainty immediately following the decision (Chu & Glass, 2013), it is possible that the decline could be a result of those fears on both the clients and the workers' side.
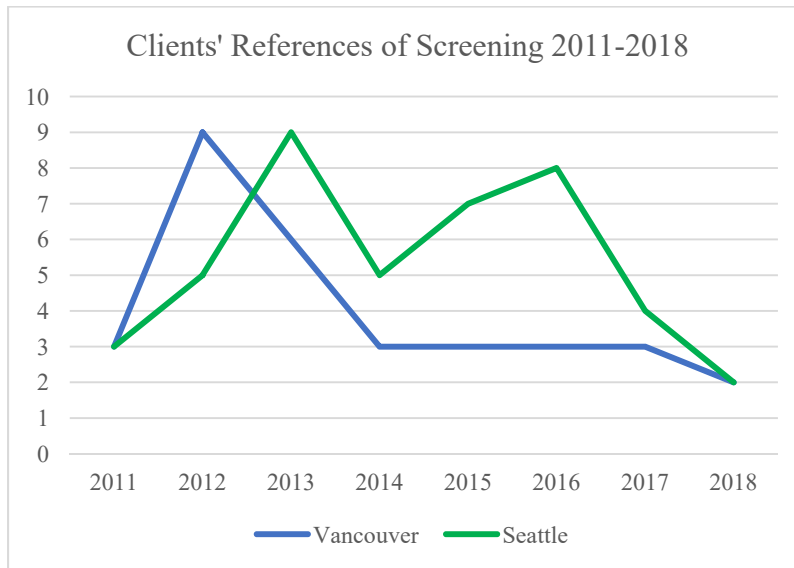


Figure 3: Screening

As for the subtheme **mitigation strategies**, there was no notable increase in reportedly discrete behaviours exhibited by either the worker or the client when meeting for the transaction (while there was on average a high of eight references in 2014, both before and after the number of references were at either three or five across the other years of interest). The fourth dependent variable selected was the **location choice**. For negotiations that begin with the initial online advertisement, one of the elements that are later discussed between the worker and the client (should the client pass screening) is that of where the sexual service will occur. From the terminology, it was easily established that an in incall refers to the client going to the worker, while an outcall is when the worker goes to the client. During the 2011-2018 time period, there were a total of 157 references to incall locations, while for outcall there were 43 references. When breaking down by year, there was no significant decrease or increase in either (despite incall being more popular than outcall).

Of the five dependent variables, three (as outlined above) may have been impacted by the PCEPA due to the sudden uncertainty surrounding new legislation (and thus affecting the behaviours that were examined), but there are other variables that would need to be considered before suggesting that an effect exists. To respond to the potential rival explanations, Seattle, WA, was chosen as the comparison city due to the lack of significant

policy change but homogeneity in all other respects (such as population demographics and political leaning) to Vancouver, BC.

For the methods of communication variable, while Vancouver experienced a slight change in the preferred point of contact, Seattle stayed relatively varied; there was no distinct theme for American clients preferring one method over the other, and when separating the data based on year, the reviews were quite varied in regards to when email or text were mentioned (with some reviews not mentioning the method of contact as per Figure 4). The same can also be reported for the clients' use of reviews when selecting a potential worker: while there was a slight increase in 2013 and 2014, by 2015 the frequency of reviews being mentioned as a deciding factor to contact a worker gradually declined as seen in Figure 2.
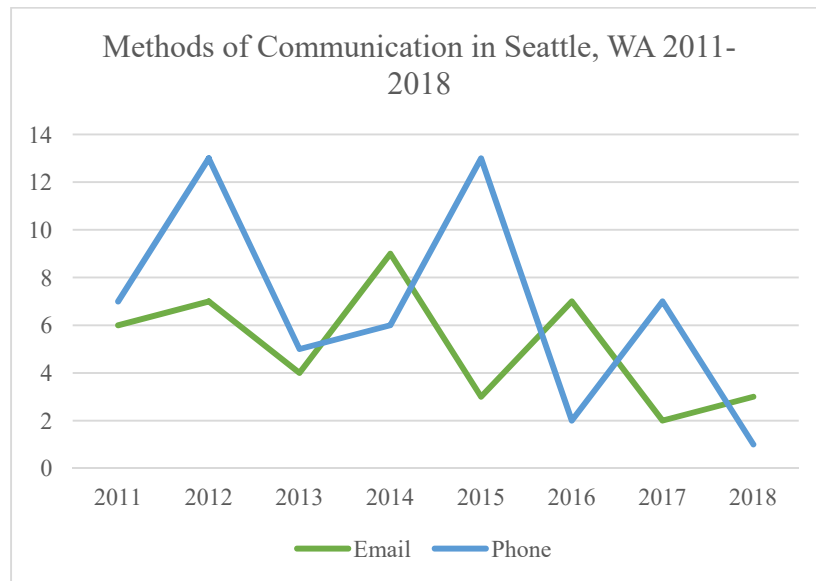


Figure 4: Methods of Communication in Seattle, WA

Where screening was concerned, there was a noticeable variability for Seattle that did not seem to coincide with the implementation date of the PCEPA: there was a peak in 2013 that led to a sharp decline in 2014, followed by a gradual trend upwards until 2016, when the frequency of occurrence went down once more (see Figure 4). Mitigation behaviours also were not a prevalent theme in Seattle, with no visible changes across the time period. There were also no obvious changes in terms of location, though for Seattle clients and workers generally preferred hotel outcalls and the general tone of these reviews hinted at a wealthier client demographic.

## Discussion

This study was largely exploratory in nature and followed the suggestions of Jones (2015) to examine the use of online platforms at a local level where there was a significant legislative shakeup that had the potential to impact regular operations. From the data collected, it was

discovered that this niche of life is both structured and has a certain level of organization. Where street-based or brothel sex workers may sometimes lack the ability to negotiate for better working conditions or pay (Chu & Glass, 2013; Comte, 2014; Benoit et al., 2017), the workers that advertise using online websites (either their own personal sites or through sites such as Tryst, preferred411, sugarnights, or Eros) and use it as the initial phase of screening (Bernstein, 2007; Roberts, 2007) have been consistently portrayed in the reviews as having amassed an immense level of respect from the clients and worth the expense[7] (Bernstein, 2007; Cunningham & Kendall, 2011). This was a recurring theme in the reviews, with a particular client stating "as with many professionals, don't mess around with this woman. She doesn't deserve it, and you'll just get dinged" (review 182, 2013). Using the online system of advertising and screening, the worker has carved out a safer space to conduct their operations. This system also has provided a platform for a specific subset of sex workers (callgirls and escorts) to thrive, but also begs the question of whether these advances in technology has led to some workers who were previously within the street-based sector to transition into the world of escorting. Cunningham and Kendall (2011)'s results would indicate that this is the case, with many street-based sex workers moving to the online world due to the increased demand for callgirls and escorts.

Additionally, the results indicate that the sex work experience negotiated through the online platform is a profession with commonly accepted standards. The workers who are registered providers on TER have amassed a reputation for quality services, and the clients have expressed as much in the reviews that were left. The lack of complaints when going through the screening and verification process also suggest a streamlined standard to the online market, with many clients already well-versed with the steps required in order to obtain services (Jones, 2015). Roberts (2007) and Castle and Lee (2008) have found similar results where the online platform has made the process of screening clients more efficient either through initial communication (for independent workers) or through escort agencies. Therefore, it is evident that the experience of seeking sexual services online is a markedly different one from the traditional formats: through the use of the advances in the digital era, it is now possible to search for and obtain services from a variety of workers best suited to the preferences of clients in the same manner that it is possible to purchase other services essential to everyday life (Bernstein, 2007). Using the reviewing system, verifying the legitimacy and quality of the workers has become increasingly simple and has also eliminated major risks that clients would typically undertake if seeking services from a streetwalker or a brothel (with the majority of the reviewers reporting the transaction to be taking place in upscale hotels or incall condominiums and the initial face-to-face meeting to occur in very discrete methods). The same can be said about the online screening process similarly eliminating the risks to the safety and detection of sex workers. Why the quality of reviews in Vancouver began to decline following the implementation of the PCEPA remains a question that needs to be addressed in future research. What could be speculated is that there has been a rise in the use of reddit subforums that could have gained

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[7] On the basis of the content of the reviews and the costs for services, it can be safely presumed that this study was specifically gathering information about the high-end sex worker population in the form of call girls and escorts.

popularity at the expense of TER. This requires further investigation into reviewer behaviour in order to compare usage between the sites to determine if that may be the case.

While it is no surprise that the sex worker population is considered a marginalized group subject to the whims of policymakers and the middle-class populace (Pitcher & Wijers, 2014; Ross & Sullivan, 2012; Wagenaar, 2017), in this study there is no evidence of the same level of inequality due to the more specialized subset of workers that use the Internet as a source of advertisement. From what can be inferred, it appears that the sex workers who operate in the online platform do not experience the same level of state-imposed control exerted over their behaviours. Rather, the relatively discrete nature of this online market has allowed for the callgirl and the escort to assert a stable claim over their autonomy and potentially avoid licensing requirements. However, it would be difficult to rule out completely if there is some crossover with some escorts also being involved in off-street brothel work as well and thus still operating within the confines of municipality requirements.

## Conclusion and Implications for Future Research

The objective of this study was to determine if there were any changes in the experience as a result of the PCEPA. Of the five dependent variables selected in the analysis process, only three were observed to have any changes. Those changes showed a decline in screening, use of prior reviews to inform client decision-making, and a change to the preferred form of communication with the worker. That screening would decrease somewhat is not particularly surprising, as one of the major concerns before the PCEPA was implemented was that the transaction would be rushed to the point where screening would either be off the table or incredibly rushed, and potentially endangering the safety or bargaining power of the worker (Chu & Glass, 2013; Lawrence, 2015). When comparing the content of the reviews from Vancouver and Seattle, it can be inferred that where the former experienced a change in terms of the process of negotiating for sexual services and the time required to successfully acquire it, in the latter there were no notable changes.  While in Vancouver the reviews after 2014 simply began to neglect any mentions of screening and review use, or if they did, described it as relatively quick, in Seattle there were no significant changes in the quality of the reviews or the description of the screening process or review use. There was also no notable revision in Washington state's laws on sex work, with every aspect of a transaction for sexual services deemed illegal, and where charges extend to buyer, seller, and any other party involved (Washington Revised Code Title 9A). Thus, while the data source is solely from the clients' lens, the results are a good indication that the implementation of the PCEPA altered the content of the reviews – yet whether that is an accurate reflection of actual client and worker behaviour is a question that would require further research.

Despite providing some insight into the online format, these results should be considered in light of some major limitations that may impact the validity of the study. Within the local context of Vancouver, BC, there appears to extensive use of the review system to obtain services, however in considering the findings of this study, in order to gain a more thorough picture of whether the PCEPA has resulted in changes among sex workers, more research

should be conducted in the form of interviews or surveys to better grasp the general makeup of this subgroup of sex workers within the industry. Secondly, while the data source was publicly available, there were some restrictions as to what could be viewed from "basic information" non-member access. As TER also provides more in-depth information regarding the sex workers (such as the particular services she will be willing to provide and the costs that go with it) through paid "VIP access" it is possible that there may be more information that could have allowed for a more thorough analysis of risk mitigation behaviours both before and after the PCEPA. Thirdly, the data was collected and exported manually, and this technique is limited due to the lack of exhaustive and comprehensive automation that could have obtained a greater set. A fourth issue that was found was the decline in the amount of information that was available in the content of the reviews found for Vancouver from 2015 onward, which could have impacted the results of the analysis post-PCEPA. While it is difficult to ascertain why the quality declined within the confines of this study, it warrants greater investigation as to why the content of the reviews have changed. Finally, as mentioned previously, the data source was comprised solely of reviews from the perspective of the clients, and thus the narratives gathered in this report were only from one side of a transaction between two (or sometimes multiple) individuals. Conducting interviews with the sex workers in a follow-up could complete the other half of the picture that has been created by the information that was found in this present study.

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# 'Hormonal Women Who Stared at the Moon Too Long': Assessing the Impact of Me Too on Young Women's Perceptions of Sexual Violence in England

## Becca Wood

**Abstract.** Having shed light on the severity of sexual violence and harassment faced by women, the Me Too movement has taken the world by storm. This study was conducted to assess the impact of the movement on young heterosexual women in England, their experience with violence and sexual harassment and how these may have changed since the introduction of the movement. Although the response to Me Too has been largely positive and males are exhibiting more sensitivity towards issues of sexual violence, participants expressed frequent experiences of falling victim to a culture of toxic masculinity. They also stressed the importance of having gender-inclusive discussions to open up a greater dialogue in which both men and women can recount their experiences and learn from each other.

## Introduction

In 2006, Tarana Burke founded the Me Too movement to shed light on the frequency and severity of sexual violence and harassment faced by women globally. The attention of media, political figures and the public was captured after a Tweet by actress Alyssa Milano in which she suggested that every victim of sexual violence post #MeToo to social media went viral,. In the two years since, with more and more women adding their own experience to the hashtag, the prevalence of sexual violence and violence against women has become apparent.

One of the key goals of the Me Too movement was to emphasize the importance of giving a voice to those previously silenced by society's inability to account for the daily violence experienced by women. Tarana Burke highlighted the importance of empathy within this movement as victims of sexual violence and harassment commonly exhibit feelings of isolation and loneliness (Iliffe & Steed, 2000). It was thus important to create a community in which survivors felt cared for and could share their experiences. The importance of empathy within movements such as these is highlighted by Rodino-Colocino (2018) who states, "an empathetic political economy can fully counter the cruelty of sexual harassment and assault…and the cruelty of silenced victims" (p.99).

As a global phenomenon, the Me Too movement has not spared Britain from the harsh realities of gendered violence. In 2018 the Office for National Statistics revealed that in England and Wales, people aged 16-24 were significantly more likely to be victims of sexual

assault than any other age group, with females accounting for 80% of this victimization. A priority of this study was also to promote women's voices and allow them to be the narrator of their lived experiences. The original focus of the Me Too movement was the female experience of sexual assault, although it now tries to encapsulate all victims. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how young British women (aged 22-24) experience sexual harassment and how they think the Me Too movement has impacted their lives, the society they live in and the behaviours of their male counterparts. This sample was selected to move away from female celebrity's experiences and instead focus on the day-to-day experiences of the 'typical' woman in order to highlight the trickle-down effects of Me Too. The contributions of the participants have been contextualised in terms of a wider literature investigating issues of masculinity and sexual violence, the UK's legislation surrounding sexual assault and the motivations behind the Me Too project.

## Understanding Male Perpetrated Sexual Violence

Sexual violence is a high-profile issue that attracts a wide amount of media attention inciting vast public reaction and misperceptions on top of deep-rooted political and professional accountability (McCartan, 2014). The definition of sexual violence as put forward by the United Nations includes "any sexual act, attempts to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances…against a person's sexuality using coercion" (the United Nations Human Rights, 2014, p.1). We can see the magnitude and thus importance of understanding violence against women as The World Health Organisation reports that approximately 70% of women have suffered some form of violence throughout their life (García-Moreno et al, 2013).

Previous literature suggests that sexual harassment against women remains prevalent in society due to the male need to achieve a masculine status and dominance (Bularzik, 1978). The concept of masculinity can be described as a way of males expressing their gender incorporating strength, a disassociation with emotions and other typically 'feminine' traits and, in extreme cases, manifestations of aggression and violence (Phipps and Young, 2013). It has been suggested that an important component of this masculine identity is asserting dominance over women (Fieldon & Davidson, 2009). Phipps and Young (2013) describe how the search for masculinity has taken many forms throughout UK history. Throughout the 1950s males asserted masculinity as a reaction to the social expectations of being a 'family man' in light of post-war economic and social expectations following the end of the war. The 1990s introduced a 'crisis of masculinity' in which the 'new man' emerged whereas other males emphasized their masculine identity as a reaction to the rise of feminism and women's rights. More recently in the UK, toxic masculinity has materialised within the introduction of 'lad culture' which is defined by the National Union for Students as a "group mentality articulated through activities such as sport and heavy alcohol consumption, and characterised by sexist and homophobic 'banter'" (2012, p.28).

Phipps et al (2017) note that the UK has recently experienced a surge of controversial sports initiations, parties themed around degrading women and 'seal clubbing' (a term coined by 'lads' to refer to the sexual pursuit of young female university students). This has contributed to a rise in physical, sexual and verbal abuse towards women in the night-time economy and student communities. The prevalence of 'lad culture' has also been associated with the increased availability of pornography, which also accounts for the normalisation of

sexual violence (Phipps and Young, 2013). Horvath et al (2011) found significant links between 'lad culture' and sexual violence after conducting a study in which the general public were unable to make distinctions between quotes from sexual offenders and 'lad mags.'[1] This integration of 'lad culture' within society has had a devastating impact on women, as Airey (2020) states that many females in contemporary society now assume they need to look, behave and speak in a certain way to insulate themselves from the sexual advances of males.

## UK Legislation on Sexual Violence and Violence Against Women

The *Protection from Harassment Act* was introduced to the UK in 1997 with the intention of addressing the rising occurrence of stalking, but grew to include a much wider scale of behaviours categorised by two criminal offences: pursuing a course of conduct amounting to harassment; and a more serious offence where the conduct puts the victim in fear of violence (Strickland, 2020). However, this policy has been strongly criticized for being deaf to advances in understanding how harassment can manifest itself, whilst the UK government has appeared to remain reactive rather than proactive (Sen and Kelly, 2007). Although definitions of sexual harassment were initially brought forward by Spender in 1985, they were not incorporated into English Law until 1997 within the aforementioned act. Despite this incorporation, there remains difficulties in defining what constitutes sexual harassment. The *Protection from Harassment Act* 1997 still does not offer a clear definition of this behaviour and does not view isolated events as harassment. This is particularly concerning as Gunby et al (2020) state that some isolated events can be even more harmful than the experience of repeated behaviours.

Some of the main criticisms of the UK government's response to sexual violence and violence against women include, firstly, the lack of statutory rights for victims of sexual violence. For example, victims have to apply to give evidence from behind screens within the courts rather than simply being standard procedure. Secondly, there is a significant disconnect between Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the first of which has a particular focus on violence against women. Finally, non-governmental organizations are noteworthy contributors to the support available for victims of sexual violence, although they remain significantly underfunded by the UK government. Furthermore, Sen and Kelly (2007) criticise the priorities of UK legislation as they state that immigrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women's needs are eclipsed by both terror and security threats. The haste at which the UK government commits to carrying out deportations has a detrimental impact for victims of gender-based violence, something which is often not immediately disclosed during early interviews. This can lead to isolating women from services that would be able to support them. Hasty deportations can also be harmful to the well-being of victims of gender-based violence as they remain vulnerable when returning to their country of origin.

## The Me Too Movement

The Me Too movement was originally created by Tarana Burke in 2006 and, on top of creating a greater awareness of sexual violence and harassment experienced by women, it also had the aim of giving females the knowledge and skills required to prosper despite being sexual assault survivors. Burke began the movement as a response to victim-survivors

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[1] 'Lad mags' are magazines targeted at young males.

often feeling isolated and ashamed of experiences of sexual violence and ultimately aimed to "give young women, particularly young women of colour from low wealth communities, a sense of empowerment from the understanding they are not alone in their circumstances" (Rodino-Colocino, 2018, p.97). In 2017, Burke stated that she wanted to correct the systemic injustice surrounding sexual violence that had been informed by years of oppression faced by women, leading to feelings of shame, fear and ostracization. The movement saw a resurgence following a Tweet made by actress Alyssa Milano "If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote 'MeToo' as a status we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem" (Milano, 2018), which ultimately led to more than 80 women accusing Harvey Weinstein of sexual harassment, assault and rape (Weinstein has since been sentenced to 23 years for a first-degree criminal sex act and third-degree rape). The delay in global attention given to the Me Too movement (from 2006-2018) has meant there is a lack of research literature available on the impact of Me Too. Gupta et al (2019) emphasized the success of the Me Too movement in empowering women who might have once been too afraid to speak out, allowing for the increased support of sexual violence victims alongside exposing alleged offenders. They argued that Me Too provided a "perfect medium for breaking the barriers and igniting cultural reckoning that prompted increased self-reflection, conversation, and changed perceptions of sexism, sexual harassment and sexual assault" (Gupta et al, 2019, p.177). Rodino-Colocino also commended the Me Too movement for its transition towards 'transformative empathy', which promotes listening rather than engaging in distancing and othering behaviours towards victims of sexual violence. In 2017, Burke stated that empathy was a key component to the Me Too campaign as you can gain 'empowerment through empathy,' where people are able to feel as though they have shared experiences and can limit any feelings of isolation that arise from being a victim of sexual violence.

Alongside the Me Too movement, it is important to note also the success of the equally progressive Time's Up Movement which emerged in 2018. Similar to Me Too, this movement was motivated by the need to end the silence and shame associated with being a sexual violence victim and had a dominant focus on workplace harassment. The movement serves as a criticism for the "systemic inequality and injustice in the workplace that have kept underrepresented groups from reaching their full potential" (Rodino-Colocino, 2018, p.99). The success of Times Up in bringing public attention to workplace harassment is particularly important as the UK Equality and Human Rights Commission previously revealed that women were often reluctant to report their experiences due to fear of victim-blaming and damage to their future employment prospects. Fieldon and Davidson (2009) had previously observed that sexual harassment in the workplace can have particularly damaging impacts, leading to the development of post-traumatic stress disorder, poor performance, truancy, absenteeism and resignation.

A 2015 TED Talk by Inés Hercovich explored an encounter with sexual violence to provide clarity of what these experiences look like and 'the difficult choices women make to survive.' On the lack of likelihood to report found amongst sexual assault victims Hercovich stated:

> "The other half don't talk about it because they fear they won't be believed. And they're right – because we don't. Today I want to share with you why I think we don't believe them. We don't believe them because when a woman tells what

happened to her, she tells us things we can't imagine, things that disturb us, things we don't expect to hear, things that shock us"[2] (Hercovich, 2015).

This quote led me to formulate the current study to give a platform to young women who all have experienced various forms of sexual harassment within their lifetime to explore how they feel about their experiences and reflect on whether movements such as Me Too may have helped them.

## Methods

### Participants and Interviews

The current study included semi-structured individual interviews with six participants all based in England. After obtaining ethics approval from the course instructor for Criminology 862 as a "minimal risk" project according to Simon Fraser University's ethics policy (R20.01), a criterion sampling approach was used where I reached out to peers that fit the age and gender required for this project and stated that I was conducting a study and asked for volunteers. The purpose of the study was to analyse young female adult perspectives of sexual violence within the United Kingdom which therefore limited participants to fit this criterion. There was a limited number of English females at the university in which this study took place (Simon Fraser University, Canada). As a female in my early 20s who is originally from the UK, I have a lot of young female friends who were willing to participate in this study. The average age of those involved was 22. In order to protect participant confidentiality no identifying information has been included within this study, including removing names and labelling participants as participant 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.[3] The interviews were semi-structured and typically lasted 40 minutes and were conducted over a Skype call due to the interviewer being based in Canada and participants based in England. Prior to the interview participants were given a one-page document listing basic information and figures regarding the Me Too movement. Participants were asked open ended questions regarding the personal impact they feel Me Too has had, whether they have noticed a change in male behaviour when it comes to sexual violence and harassment and what they would like to see happen in terms of policy. From these questions I was hoping to discover whether these participants felt that Me Too had made an impact on both incidences of and thoughts surrounding sexual violence and harassment, but also to account for whether Me Too had impacted their experiences of certain male behaviour. It was also important for me to gain an understanding of whether a more open discussion on sexual violence and harassment had lead participants to feel more able to disclose incidences.

### Coding

A combination of inductive and deductive coding strategies were implemented, partially inspired by Cresswell's (2016) 'in vivo' label technique using short phrases mentioned by participants to identify themes which enabled comparisons between transcripts to be made in order to account for multiple perspectives. Although this study had the primary aim of assessing the impact of the Me Too movement, it also sought to act as a voice for the

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[2] This is a Spanish to English translation.
[3] The removal of names and the assignment of participant labels was done during transcription process and no names have been included within any of the saved files associated with the study.

experiences of these women. Therefore, themes were not just identified by frequency across the interviews, but also which aspects of sexual harassment individual participants felt it was most important to emphasise. This technique initially produced five themes including: (1) unwanted sexual behaviours; (2) personal impact of Me Too; (3) policy implications; (4) issues of maturity; and (5) female perspectives of male behaviour. There was significant crossover between many of these themes which ultimately lead to recoding into main themes and sub-themes to eliminate repetition.

## Results and Discussion

After analysing and coding all of the transcripts the most numerous overarching themes that emerged were: 1. Unwanted sexual attention 2. Issues of maturity and 3. Female perspectives of male behaviour, all themes (and their sub-themes) addressed the overall impact of the Me Too movement and will be discussed below.

## 1. Unwanted Sexual Attention

Unwanted sexual attention was one of the key themes identified within the coding of transcripts. Participants discussed what they felt constitutes sexual harassment and their tolerance for this behaviour, and typically put emphasis on the frequency in which they experience these behaviours. Within this theme the most prominent issues were that of street harassment and drinking culture.

### Street Harassment

The definition of sexual violence is vague and what could be considered as acceptable and not-acceptable behaviours desperately needs clarity. Fileborn (2012) defines unwanted sexual attention as "any unwanted advances or behaviour that participants interpreted as being sexual in nature and intent" (p.244). This definition is not concrete and is thus problematic. Certainly there were an overwhelming number of references within the interviews to a wide variety of behaviours, including catcalling, sexual comments and whistling (otherwise known as 'Street Harassment') all of which are not considered within criminal law (Gunby et al, 2020). As participant five noted:

> It's their every-day behaviour in the streets, like obviously sexual assault is awful but the wolf whistling, making you feel uncomfortable, following girls home – I'd love to see that eradicated and for people to know how bad it is.

This statement highlights how unwanted sexual behaviours are relative to the person experiencing them, alluding to the idea that some may view these degrading behaviours as minor and a non-issue whilst others express the desire for people to know that this should not be accepted. Critically, the fact that such harassment does not include a physical component should not negate its impact. As previously stated, some may see street harassment as 'harmless', others may see it as a prelude for physical threat. Fairchild (2010) conducted a study which revealed that nearly 30 per cent of young women reported experiencing catcalling and whistling frequently. The pervasiveness of the problem associated with these behaviours was reflected within the current study as every participant divulged their personal experiences without being prompted. An important issue within street harassment is the frequency in which it occurs, as participants demonstrated its prevalence: *it is something that happens every single day; it is constant* (P4)*, it is every single*

*day* (P2)*; it does put into perspective how frequent and daily it is all the time* (P1)*; how much it happens and how it happens to everyone* (P5).

Ultimately, this can be used to critique current UK policy and education, showing that there is no effective deterrence against perpetrators of these day-to-day harassment behaviours, i.e. there is no accountability within current legislation. The presence of legislation against these behaviours would arguably mitigate the issue as it allows society to label perpetrators as deviant, and express societal repugnance towards their actions. Vera-Grey (2017) identifies this as an important issue, as academic literature has a focus on domestic events of sexual harassment and sexual attention rather than the day-to-day experiences of people. Although street harassment might be seen as minor when compared to violent sexual behaviours such as rape, research has shown that hostile and objectifying behaviours towards women results in a higher likelihood of sexual violence (Awasthi, 2017). Zebel et al (2008) argued that such objectification is a dehumanising process that leads perpetrators to be blind of the pain experienced by the vulnerable groups. Street harassment can be a symptom of more pertinent physical threats, and to mitigate these incidences of sexual violence we need to be aware of tackling these behaviours from a bottom-up approach.

It is not just perpetrators that view street harassment as harmless or insignificant. Despite their arguing that such behaviours are unacceptable, it was evident that the participants in this study felt they were insufficiently important to generate complaints, expressing a sense of resignation or hopelessness surrounding such day to day harassments. Statements from multiple participants when discussing street harassment included: *I think that's something you're going to have to deal with anyway; mundane stuff that you can't really complain about* (P3)*; but that is always going to happen* (P4)*.* This indicates the necessity for increased education surrounding the negative impacts of street harassment, as indicated by Awasthi (2017) who argues that we need to participate in eradicating the collective belief that everyday forms of dehumanization are inconsequential.

### *Drinking Culture*

Despite street harassment being a regular discussion point within the interviews, participants were also keen to discuss the impact of drinking culture in the UK on unwanted sexual behaviours. Gunby et al (2020) noted that academic literature on topics of unwanted sexual attention tends be limited to that which occurs within the workplace or in an academic setting, arguing that more attention should be given to its occurrence in bars and nightclubs. Participant five disclosed their experience of unwanted sexual attention coinciding with drinking culture:

> I think in my day-to-day experience guys are lovely but just on nights out, drinking in bars, there needs to be a line there. It seems like as soon as the lights go down, boys in clubs, I think the drinks have made them forget about it

Emotions tended to be attached to the issues that come with the association between drinking culture and male sexual advances. As evidenced above, several participants felt that their sober interactions with male acquaintances were generally positive, however their behaviour typically changed after alcohol consumption.

Fileborn (2016) investigated the night-time economy in terms of its association with sexual behaviour, where entry into bars and clubs contributes to a change in values and what would be deemed as acceptable behaviour. Grazian (2007) also recognised this pattern and identified 'the Girl Hunt' which refers to the activities of heterosexual males who go to clubs and bars in the search for a female counterpart whilst exercising masculine behaviours in an attempt to obtain power. This is particularly prevalent within UK 'Lad Culture' where sexually aggressive behaviours can become normalised (Phipps and Young, 2015). This is particularly concerning as the National Union of Students stated that "'Laddism' is also thought to be currently gaining a great deal of social and cultural power and has been described as the template of masculinity for contemporary young British males" (National Union of Students, 2012, p.10). This indicates the need for more progressive education for males within early education, identifying which behaviours are and are not acceptable.

Fileborn (2016) observed that as sexually aggressive behaviour is tolerated and ultimately viewed as 'normal' within these settings people are far less inclined to report it. This was apparent within the interviews as participant one stated *if you reported to a manager that a man just grabbed your bum or something the concern would be they wouldn't take it as seriously as you perceive it to be*[4]. This suggests that businesses involved in the night-time economy should engage more actively in becoming 'sexual harassment free zones,' ultimately mitigating unwanted sexual advances and encouraging victims to feel comfortable in reporting incidents.

### Self-Blaming Behaviours

The final but slightly less frequent sub-theme that was evident in some participant's discussions on unwanted sexual attention was their tendency to be dismissive of inappropriate behaviours. Participant three exhibited these minimising attitudes:

> I do think people taking the piss[5] when it's jokes around Me Too are insensitive[6], it is not funny but I'll laugh it off because I'm not going to say "you shouldn't be making jokes like that" because it's not that serious

P3 also went on to say that after an encounter with their boss in which he made inappropriate jokes that *he wasn't being serious – I know him so its fine*. This illustrates the kind of interpretive issues that contribute to people's decisions not to report incidences of sexually questionable behaviour. Furthermore, highlighting why it is difficult to simply list offensive behaviours as interpretation is dependent on the victim's relationship with the perpetrator, location, perceived intent. Airey (2020) states that too many people, even those who actively fight victim-blaming attitudes, have a tendency to self-blame when experiencing feelings of discomfort, "if only I had not said/worn/laughed at/been alone with etc" (p.7). This demonstrates how there needs to be an increased acceptance that it is permissible to find certain things offensive, and that the experience of feeling degraded is most likely because you are genuinely experiencing harassment. A progressive scheme that

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[4] For reader reference this participant was speaking in the context of nightclubs

[5] 'Taking the piss' is British slang, defined as a "pejorative term meaning to take liberties at the expense of others…it is a shortening of the idiom taking the piss out of, which is an expression meaning to mock, tease, joke, ridicule or scoff."

[6] For clarification, participant three is referring to a time in which her male boss reached over her to grab something and brushed past her. He then made the joke that he "did not want to Me Too" her.

could mitigate these experiences is the Humane Acts Bystander Intervention Training (HABIT), a programme which is rooted within the assumption that everyone has gut-level moral inclinations that tell you when a behaviour is not acceptable. The training has the goal of making people better at recognising these inclinations and educate them to listen to these impulses and intervene in any situation which could be deemed 'sexually sketchy' (Levine, 2018).

## 2. Issues of Maturity

One of the first contributions that many participants made within their interviews was to acknowledge that in the past, they have had misconceptions of what behaviours should be tolerated, putting this down to a lack of emotional maturity. Predominantly, participants expressed the belief that they had previously confused inappropriate male behaviour with the excitement surrounding attention from male counterparts. Participant five narrates their journey into maturity that brought a deeper understanding of which behaviours should be tolerated:

> A few years ago if you were in a situation where you were surrounded by older boys and they were being a bit rude but in a sexual way, as a young girl you don't think anything of it, you're a bit uncomfortable but you don't think anything bad of it. But maybe that's because we were young but it is so important because now I can look back and if anything has happened like that I can think 'oh my god, this has happened'. The time we spent as fifteen year old girls with a group of lads from the school we went to, their behaviour towards us wasn't friendly. I never thought about that until recently, and I thought god that was pretty bad wasn't it? Nothing ever really happened but the way their behaviour was, it was questionable. As a young girl you never really think that is going to happen and its horrible. But now I think being able to recognise it even just the slightest bit, there are so many people to talk to and even if it's not your friends, there will always be someone who has been through the same thing.

Participant four also disclosed similar experiences of reflecting on the naivety they exhibited at a younger age:

> You go into the world when you're sixteen and you start going on nights out for the first time but you don't actually know. I am not saying the girls put themselves in those situations, but I did at sixteen, I loved it if a guy slapped my arse or said I was attractive. I felt validated, I was at the chip shop and some guy told me I was ugly and I cried about it for so long. You just need to be told that is not your worth

These admissions from the participants could definitely serve as a critical commentary on the schooling systems in place within the UK, as they indicate they were not receiving adequate education regarding what constitutes acceptable behaviour and what they should tolerate. There is a fertile foundation that comes with being of a younger age which contributes to misunderstanding and mistakes being made surrounding sexual violence and harassment. As aptly stated by participant four, young people need to be taught their worth and that they are more than the compliments and attention other people give them. Furthermore, these participant contributions point to the importance of introducing better educative policies surrounding sexual assault within schools in order to inform all genders about what constitutes appropriate behaviour. Some participants were keen to see the

introduction of increased education surrounding issues of sexual violence as shown by participant five below:

> I would like to see people, especially in schools like secondary school, being able to see, for example, someone being really manipulative towards you and you felt rubbish about it and didn't know what to do. I would like to see more awareness of that, it doesn't have to be physical. I would like to see more people even just seeing a role play of different abuses because I think that is so important. Yeah – people are aware that domestic violence is physical but we also need to know about the mental side of it

One example of a good educative policy implemented within some middle and high schools in the US is called Sexual Ethics for a Caring Society. This scheme teaches school students to "approach sex… as a good person who treats other people fairly and with caring…it does not promote self-defence for girls or self-control for boys, the usual division of labour in sex education, but rather 'mutuality', the sum of self-protection and caring for the other" (Levine, 2018, p.24). Tatter (2018) also highlights some of the important features that need to be included within the sex education curriculum in schools. These included teaching students about the role alcohol plays in issues of consent, that consent is not just something that needs to be obtained by heterosexual males and establishing clearer definitions of what sexual harassment is.

Ultimately, the participants appeared grateful that the Me Too movement had contributed to them being able to be reflective and draw these conclusions: *the stuff we have went through is a lot more serious than we thought it was. You know it's brought that to light which is scary but good* (P1); *I would be able to prevent it just by knowing what my rights are as a woman and I think that's what Me Too gave me more than anything* (P6); *people have more of an understanding of what sexual assault actually is and what it can look like* (P2).

This serves as a demonstration of the positive impact that the Me Too movement has had on at least a select few people. Their declarations of feeling more aware of their rights and ability to correct previous injustices also point to the rise of 'feisty femininity,' coined by Gunby et al (2020) to refer to the resisting behaviour demonstrated by women who have experienced acts of unwanted sexual aggression. In the future it may be possible to consider the evidence of the Me Too generation within educational interventions.

## 3. Female Perceptions of Male Behaviour

When asked about the impact of Me Too, participants recounted their experiences of male behaviour since, and prior to, the movement received global attention and explored the considerable advances that still need to be made within society.

### *A Lack of Understanding*

The most dominant theme present within the interviews was that the female participants did not believe that males understood: (a) the importance of movements such as Me Too; (b) the prevalence of sexual violence within society; and (c) the impact of their words. As participant two stated:

> Men don't live in a system of sexism that means their whole existence makes them a victim of assault a lot of the time. They can't understand it because they haven't experienced the lived experience in a women's body so they can't understand it.

The participants were expressing their awareness of living within a patriarchal system which puts them at a disadvantage and in which males do not express enough empathy for these experienced gender differences.

As identified previously, the majority of literature on sexual harassment has focused on the workplace. The Me Too and Time's Up movements brought global attention to these issues, and participants were keen to account for these successes but often felt that, as women, they were not taken seriously. Perhaps worse, awareness of Me Too was used among males as a token badge of sexual correctness, but one that falls short of changing behaviour. Participant three, who works in the service industry, spoke about her boss continuing what could be considered degrading or patronising behaviours but justifying these by acknowledging his awareness of the Me Too movement:

> Like he said "I don't want to MeToo you", sometimes men will say something and do something but try and recoil it by saying I know I shouldn't have done that – they seem more aware, something they would have done before but they now seem to know it's wrong then will try and make a joke out of it or try and cover it up by using Me Too to seem more aware when actually they've just done something shitty

This was also an issue acknowledged by participant two:

> The pub I'm working in at the moment says things like 'this is a sexual harassment free zone' and the guys who work there talk about feminism and Me Too which suggests they understand it but they still do things like make dodgy comments about what you're wearing, say you look nice too often and things like that. Their behaviour hasn't changed but they think it has because they can acknowledge it. They think that is enough but they're not changing their behaviour

While it could be considered progressive that males appear more aware of the general victimisation of females, it would seem the Me Too movement has fallen short of leading to a change in behaviours. This 'lack of understanding' theme points again to the increased need for educational policies that emphasize what constitutes acceptable behaviour. It is important to stress the benefits of acknowledging what were once, and arguably still are, considered 'uncomfortable' conversations; however, the key goal of actually changing behaviour should be at the forefront of educative practices.

The workplace experiences of the participants of this study are consistent with previous literature. Although these participants are based in England, interviews conducted by the Restaurant Opportunity Centres United in the US found that nine in ten restaurant staff experienced unwanted sexual behaviours (Levine, 2018). The participants' experiences of a lack of transition from awareness to manifesting itself within behaviour were also evident globally. For example, Levine (2018) notes that although Ford Motor Company paid tens of millions of dollars for settlements of sex discrimination and harassment cases, workers stated this did nothing to change their experience on the factory floor. Although in the workplace there is anti-harassment legislation in place within the Equality Act 2010, evidence suggests that it is not being applied effectively.

To get a better understanding of the impact of Me Too (and the Time's Up movement) participants were asked if they felt they would be more likely to disclose incidences of sexual harassment within the workplace. Many of the participants felt they would be more comfortable in reporting these incidences as a result of the Me Too movement, and indeed overwhelmingly positive responses were recorded: *the idea of Me Too is that everyone is in it together, I'm not much of a vocal person but because of that I would be more so* (P4), *it might have made me more confident to speak out if something was happening in the workplace* (P2), *it's made me more likely to report incidences to co-workers* (P5). Although participant five did feel they would be more likely to disclose incidences of sexual harassment, they went on to say *it is sad because I think a lot of people wouldn't feel like that for example if their bosses were male it would depend how comfortable they were. It all comes back to the male perspective and how they perceive it as well*. Therefore, although notable progression has been accomplished, potentially as a result of Me Too, there is still more work to be done to raise employee confidence around the disclosure of uncomfortable sexual behaviours. It must also be noted that despite participants expressing a willingness to report, this may not actually translate into action.

Some participants felt that males would not perceive their experiences as legitimate or might consider them as borderline hysteric: *silly women getting upset again* (P3), *hormonal women who have maybe looked at the moon for a little bit too long* (P6), *women are stupid, women don't want equal rights they want to be better than men* (P1), *let's not go near women in case they suddenly accuse us of sexual harassment* (P2). This could prove to be a hinderance to these participants as this perception of male attitudes may ultimately make them less likely to enter into discussion with males about their experiences and this reluctance would in turn, limit opportunities to increase understanding and awareness.

It is concerning that such perceptions might actually be increasing the gender divide, where lack of communication leads to further demonization and division within society. Although the participants expressed statements that could be considered as extreme, they seem to reflect a genuine underlying issue, as Quinn (2002) found that when women disclose incidences of harassment, men often describe them as harmless. Further literature suggests that 'locker room' talk, where males may engage in discriminatory discussions surrounding females, is deemed acceptable due to its 'behind the scenes' nature and the lack of a direct victim being present therefore ultimately being viewed as harmless (Cole and Brennan, 2019). This might suggest that the participants opinions of male thinking might be well founded. Although the extremities disclosed by participants was somewhat concerning, they did go on to acknowledge the importance of open discussions between genders.

### The Necessity of Discussion

When participants were asked about what, as a society, could be done better when it comes to sexual violence there was an overwhelming emphasis on the need for better discussion between genders. When the topic of conversation was first approached within interviews, the participants felt that males often exhibited reluctance and discomfort at these conversations: *there is a pattern of wanting to ignore sexual assault and wanting to ignore how often it happens* (P2); *I don't think it is a topic of conversation they would bring up* (P4); *I feel like because it doesn't apply to them it's something they feel they don't need to discuss* (P5). The notion of conversations of sexual violence not being applicable to these males is

something that should be addressed further. If these males believe themselves to be nice people who care about women they may feel they should not be associated with misogynistic and predatory behaviours. However, being a part of this discussion can often be more beneficial for females just by acknowledging these issues, without being directly linked to the problem. Cole and Brennan (2019) theorized that males who are reluctant to engage in discriminatory conversations regarding females may experience a loss of masculine status. This could also be applied to conversations regarding sexual violence and explain why participants experienced feelings of disassociation from males.

Despite this, participants acknowledged that when in mixed-gendered groups there was a tendency on both sides to engage in avoiding behaviour as noted by participant five, who stated *I haven't spoken to any males about it which is interesting*. This indicates that all members of society should be more proactive in engaging in conversations around sexual violence, a notion that was voiced by all participants within the study. The participants' desires for more gender-inclusive discussions surrounding issues of sexual violence included: *maybe we do need to have a non-aggressive way of incorporating men into understanding* (P4); *I think we should be having healthier neutral conversations about it to make it less intimidating to men* (P6); *maybe we should be a bit more inclusive to men* (P5); *maybe talking to males about it would be a good way to bridge the gap between that* (P2).

While the Me Too movement's focus was on representing the voice of women, in order to make significant progress it requires that every member of society actively participate in discussions that raise awareness of issues surrounding sexual violence and harassment. One successful method of doing this was implemented by the 'Hands off Pants On' propaganda video, which showed men reading the words of females who have experienced workplace sexual harassment. The men then went on to reflect on what they had read, often relating it back to their female family members, Levine (2018) stated that though "the comments are paternalistic, macho-attitudes on the same spectrum of the male privilege that produces sexual abuse" they displayed "empathy as fellow humans and solidarity as union brothers" (p.24). The benefits of engaging in gender-inclusive discussion, giving female victims of sexual violence the platform that they deserve, can be aptly summarized by participant two:

> Men need to understand how important it is that if a woman is talking about their experiences of sexual assault, or even catcalling, they need to sit there and say 'I believe you'. To say things like that, or to acknowledge it happened. I think the women in my life are really good at saying I believe you, I never feel doubted around them when I tell them things that have happened. So I always try and tell people 'I believe you no matter what'. I think men need to be better at that, saying I believe you, or saying that it is awful that happened rather than trying to rationalize it, just put yourself in their position. If you can't understand what it must have been like, then just believe them and sympathize.

It is also necessary to acknowledge that females are not the only victims of sexual assault within society. In 2018, the Office for National Statistics released that within the UK reports of sexual offences against males has more than tripled within the last decade. Furthermore, a study conducted by the charity Survivors UK revealed that it takes, on average, 26 years for a male abuse victim to come forward (Survivors UK, 2017). This exemplifies that the voice of every victim of abuse needs to be accounted for, and excluding males from discussions of sexual violence contributes to the same systemic issues that left female

victims silenced for centuries. Although this study focussed on voicing the experiences of females and their perceptions of sexual violence within society, future work should include providing a platform for males and members of the LGBTQ+ population to similarly express their experiences.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has shown that overall, the young females I interviewed tended to see a positive change if not within society, then at least within themselves as a result of the Me Too movement although they also still reported an ongoing problem, especially around lad culture. Many had *not* experienced a direct positive change in male behaviour, arguing more progress is required to achieve a sexual harassment free society, but this does not mitigate the positive impact that Me Too has had. Although this study cannot establish whether, on average, behaviours have changed following the Me Too movement, it can reflect the personal experiences of a limited number of young women in England.

This paper has also discussed the need for better education policies within schools in order to seed guidance as to what appropriate behaviour looks like to younger age groups. People (in this case females) should not have to experience sexually questionable behaviours when they are young without being given the tools to understand the gravity of the situation. At present such realisations come much later (sometimes as much as five years after the initial event). Although some would argue that values are 'caught not taught', when it comes to appropriate sexual behaviours children can be educated on how they should behave and be taught the importance of consent.

A limitation of this study is that we need to be more inclusive when it comes to discussing issues of sexual violence. Sexual violence is not solely a female-victim specific offence and therefore no gender, sexuality or race should be excluded from the discussion. On that issue, this study was able to focus on the experiences of heterosexual young females, but future work should involve similar studies amongst males, the LGBTQ+ population and older adults, so that a more holistic determination of current and past experiences of sexual harassment and the impact of Me Too can be established.

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# Sexual Harassment in Restaurants

## Kayleigh McDonald

**Abstract.** This is a study of four women's experiences with sexual harassment in the restaurant industry. All have worked at different restaurants and vary in age, and all have had experiences of verbal or physical sexual harassment while working. Some of the women had sexual harassment from coworkers and others from customers. This study of these women's experiences shows that sexual harassment is prominent in the restaurant industry and suggests there should be more action taken by managers to combat the issue.

## Introduction

Women have been treated as inferior to men for generations. Even though today women are treated more like equals there are still gender differences, especially in the hospitality industry. The hospitality industry is still predominately female. Think about when you go into a restaurant; how many male waiters do you see? Most the time it is none or a few. Now think about how many times the manager has come over, how often is the manager a female? Very rarely are managers female and the waiters all male in a restaurant. This is because there is still some continuation of the idea that women are inferior, and that hospitality is a woman's job (while the management of the women is of course a man's job). This study is going to address four women's experiences while working in the restaurant industry and their interaction with other staff members and customers.

## Literature Review

Each restaurant has its own set of rules for how the dining experience should go. For example, each restaurant has its own uniforms or dress code, shaped differently, and the timing for courses will be different (Erickson, 2004). One thing that is the same among all restaurants is that the waiter or waitress is there to please the customer, sometimes going above and beyond their job description to make the customer happy (Erickson, 2004). Being a waiter or waitress is not as easy as most people think it is. While working you get sweaty, dirty and tired (Erickson, 2004). Waiters and waitresses need to be able to be able to work together with everyone else in the restaurant (e.g., cooks, mangers, other waiters and waitresses, hostess, bussers) to be able to keep the restaurant running like a well-oiled machine. With everyone working together it allows for fewer mistakes to happen in a night. Everyone is always moving so fast in the restaurant, which is needed for a shift to run smoothly. If one person throws off the balance in the restaurant then problems can start occurring, but even with issues, the restaurant must still stay open and try to keep the customers happy. Waiters and waitresses normally deal with the angry or unhappy customers and some people believe that is the worst part of a server's job. In reality bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment is the worst part of the restaurant industry (Gilbert et al, 1998; Mathisen et al., 2008). Sexual harassment may be a bigger issue than researchers think (Slonaker et al., 2007).

The government of Canada (2019) defines sexual harassment in a workplace as

> "… any conduct, comment, gesture, or contact of a sexual nature that is likely to cause offence or humiliation to any employee; or that might, on reasonable grounds, be perceived by that employee as placing a condition of a sexual nature on employment or on any opportunity for training or promotion."

There is a section in the Labour Code of Canada that addresses sexual harassment and affirms that everyone has the right to be free from sexual harassment while at work (Government of Canada, 2019). With this being part of the labour code, all employees and employers should know what constitutes sexual harassment in the workplace, but it seems as though sexual harassment is still a taboo phenomenon to discuss in the restaurant industry (Weber et al., 2008). Laabs (1995) found that men and women often had differing opinions on what constituted sexual harassment (as cited in Weber et al. 1995). This differing of opinion could be a factor in restaurant sexual harassment.

## Possible Reasons for Sexual Harassment

Powers and Leili (2016) found that restaurant workers were reluctant to talk about sexual harassment because it was a taboo topic. Some of the interviewees even said they did not believe it happened. However, Powers and Leili's (2016) study has been contradicted by other researchers. Woods and Kavanaugh (1994) indicate that sexual harassment is a widespread phenomenon to the point where it could be considered a pandemic that affects mostly women. Sexual harassment may arise because there are a number of people working together in the restaurant as well as with the customers, which leads to constant high levels of stress and conflict (Gilbert et al., 1998). Gilbert et al. (1998) found that sexual harassment may be prevalent because the restaurant industry is mostly young women who are less confident in dealing with people, so their power is being socially attractive. The notion of sexual harassment comes from the idea that women working in the restaurant industry are meant to look good by wearing makeup, having their hair done, wearing short skirts and shirts that show cleavage, which then proves the idea that the waitresses are working because they are considered sexy (Gilbert et al., 1998). Many restaurants provide a uniform for their female employees that is normally tight and form fitting, which shows off the woman's body. In certain restaurants waitresses are expected to flirt as part of the job, according to Gilbert et al. (1998). Seven per cent of their respondents agreed with that statement and 39% were neutral. This could be something that is forced by management or the waitress may choose to flirt for her own gain (Gilbert et al., 1998). Even if the waitress chooses to flirt for her own gain some customers will overstep their boundaries, which is when the interaction with the customer becomes awkward (Gilbert et al., 1998).

Since restaurants are set up for close customer interaction, they are considered to be breeding grounds for sexual harassment (Gilbert et al., 1998; Weber et al., 1995). Slonaker et al. (2007) found that restaurant workers face all kinds of sexual harassment ranging from

> "…cartoons, graffiti, and pictures; innuendos, comments, and teasing; displaying devices or toys; asking about practices or preferences; simulating acts and making women play

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degrading games; spreading false rumors about contacts or relations; making requests or demands for relations; offensive touching, groping, and grabbing; exposing genitals; forced sitting on laps, [to] offers of job-based rewards in exchange for sexual favors (p.54)."

This shows the severity of sexual harassment in the restaurant industry and it comes from coworkers, managers and customers (Slonaker et al., 2007). Slonaker et al.  (2007) also found that when a waitress was asked why they would stay at the job even though they were being sexually harassed the response would be either the money was good, or they were looking for a new job.  This research finding goes to show the restaurant mentality that sexual harassment is something that is considered "just part of the job."

## Sexual Harassment Between Staff

Williams et al. (1999) state that according to law, discrimination that comes in sexual forms should be prohibited at the loss of opportunity or benefits for that worker. Sexual harassment must include the loss of opportunity or benefit for a case to be brought to trial (Williams et al., 1999). Chia-Jeng and Kleiner (2001), Matulewicz (2015) and Weber et al. (1995) found that more women than men working in a restaurant had been in positions where coworkers were telling sexually explicit jokes, being patted by another employee, being touched by another employee, or being hugged while working. Some other sexual behaviour between co-workers can include flirting, consuming pornography, sexual joking, bantering and touching, dating, or affairs (Williams et al., 1999). Restaurant workers tend to bond together because they work evenings, weekends and holidays, which is when most people spend time with friends and family (Chia-Jeng & Kleiner, 2001). This allows for lines to be blurred between work and social life and makes monitoring sexual harassment more difficult (Chia-Jeng & Kleiner, 2001). It is likely that a person in a position of power within the restaurant will commit sexual harassment, which makes it difficult for the individual to stand-up for her or himself (Mathisen et al., 2008). It has been thought that the busy environment in a restaurant is what can lead to hostility, harassment, and sexual harassment among staff members (Mathisen et al., 2008). Williams et al. (1999) found that not all relationships between coworkers involve sexual harassment; sometimes the relationships are consensual, but the line between the two sometimes can be hard to draw.

Sexual harassment by customers can lead to poor relationships among other employees, especially if the employees condone the behaviour (Gilbert et al., 1998). Companies where management accepts the behaviour are more likely to have problems with staff (Gilbert et al., 1998). Some managers may not know that they need to step in when a waiter or waitress is being sexual harassed by a customer (Chia-Jeng & Kleiner, 2001). In some companies the sexual behaviour from customers towards staff is considered normal and if a complaint is put in then the staff member will be fired (Williams et al. 1999). Giuffre and Williams (1994) found that part of the problem could be that mangers still do not fully understand what constitutes sexual harassment. Some waitresses and waiters might hesitate to come forward out of fear they will not be believed (Giuffre & Williams, 1994).

## Sexual Harassment Between Worker and Customer

Yagil (2008) found that sexual harassment behaviour is part of the organization or at least that no one discourages the behaviour. A reason why customers will sexually harass a waiter or waitress is because of the "customer is always right" mentality (Yagil, 2008). The waiter or waitress is expected to still serve the customer and be friendly no matter the circumstances (Yagil, 2008). It is likely that the manager will deny the accusation and will not record the information because sexual attractiveness and flirtation are often part of the job (Yagil, 2008). Williams et al. (1999) found that the age of the waitress was a factor in sexual harassment. Women who were under the age of 22 disagreed more with the statement of being sexually harassed at work compared to women older than 22 (Weber et al. 1995) This could be because women who are younger define sexual harassment differently than an older, more experienced waitress.

The service role is highly sexualized which can lead to a belief that customers hold more power than the worker (Yagil, 2008). The idea of the customer having control of the waiters' and waitresses' tips also adds to the power dynamic (Matukewicz, 2015). When the customer is the one controlling the amount of money, then the waitress or waiter is going to put up with more to get the tip (Matukewica, 2015). Matukewicz (2016) found that women working in the service industry laugh off or go along with sexual harassment. Sometimes if the harassment is bad enough the waitress will quit or talk back to the customer (Matukewicz, 2016). Morganson and Major (2014) found that most waitresses would become less friendly to the customers if they were sexually harassed. In some cases, workers will deny that the sexual harassment ever happened because it is so prevalent within the restaurant industry (Williams et al. 1999).

## Misinformation about Sexual Harassment

Webber et al. (1995) found that many employees did not know of any policies in place by their company. Webber et al. (1995) determined that more restaurants what were primarily male staff had higher likelihood of having a sexual assault policy than if the restaurant staff was primarily females. A study showed that females were more likely to tell a superior about being sexually harassed by a customer (Webber et al., 1995). Weber et al. (1995) found that there is a discrepancy in what restaurant workers consider sexual harassment and other jobs. Things like complimenting on appearance, looking at the waiter or waitress repeatedly, and using vulgar language or sexually explicit terms were not considered sexual harassment by many individuals in Weber et al.'s (1995) study. Weber et al. (1995) found that sexual harassment is the most prominent among hospitality jobs but not a lot of research has been done in the restaurant industry specifically. The restaurant industry has a number of grey areas around sexual harassment because the industry is becoming more of an entertainment industry then a food industry (Weber et al., 1995).

## Solutions to Sexual Behaviour

One way to combat these issues is to implement policy or regulations (Chia-Jeng & Kleiner, 2001). Chia-Jeng and Kleiner (2001) came up with nine recommendations on how to combat the issue of sexual harassment in restaurants. Their first suggestion is that the top executives of

the company must commit to a workplace with no sexual harassment. Their second suggestion is to communicate that there is a sexual harassment prevention policy or that the organization is working on sexual harassment policies. Thirdly, there needs to be corporate training where all the managers and supervisors learn about sexual harassment. After that a policy needs to be put into place and employees need to be aware of how to report sexual harassment, thorough investigations need to take place about the sexual harassment, and the harassers need to be punished by such interventions as refusing service and not allowing them in the establishment. To make sure that these policies are being followed, periodic evaluations and training sessions for all employees need to occur.

## Consequences of Sexual Harassment in the Restaurant Industry

Studies have shown that being exposed to harassment can lead to negative effects on health and well-being of a person (Mathisen et al., 2008). Another effect of harassment coworkers and customers could be burnout (Gilbert et al., 1998: Mathisen et al., 2008). Sexual harassment could also lead to high turnover rates because employees are less likely to have job satisfaction and less commitment to the job (Mathisen et al., 2008). According to Gilbert et al. (1998) restaurants have a hard time keeping staff and 23% quit because of sexual harassment by customers. Mathisen et al.'s (2008) studies show a correlation between burnout, harassment and the turnover rate.

## The Current Study

The current study was done to add to the small extant literature on sexual harassment in the restaurant industry, more specifically in Canada (Morganson & Major, 2014).  This study also sought to build knowledge around sexual harassment and how prevalent it is in the restaurant industry. This study is going to address sexual harassment between staff member and customers in Alberta using a qualitative method. The hypothesis for this study is that all four of the women interviewed will have experienced sexual harassment even though they differ in age. I also hypothesize that sexual harassment will be normalized by the interviewees because of restaurant industry culture.

## Methods

I received ethics approval for this "minimal risk" project from the course instructor as is mandated in the Simon Fraser University ethics policy (R20.01). After my ethics was approved for the project, a consent form was prepared. Participants for the study were found using two methods. Having worked in the restaurant industry prior to coming to grad school, I reached out to some prospective participants personally who I thought might be interested in participating.  Secondly, I posted on my Facebook page that I was looking for waiters and waitresses willing to participate in research and if they were interested to contact me personally for more information. If the individual was interested then the consent form was sent, which explained the project in-depth and explained the risks this project potentially could have. If they read the consent form and still wanted to participate then a phone interview was set up. The consent form explained how I was going to protect their information. Interviews were recorded but deleted as soon as they were transcribed. The interviews were transcribed

using a pseudonym to help maximize confidentiality. The transcribed interviews were encrypted on my laptop as well as password protected. I could not promise anonymity because some of the participants worked at the same place so the other individual might know that the other person participated. I also would know who each participant was. There were some concerns about the sensitivity of the questions but if a participant needed a break that was given, and any question that participant did not want to answer was skipped. If the participant was struggling with reliving the experiences, then a sexual assault help line would have been provided. None of the participants seemed to struggle with the questions and the extra precautions were not invoked by any participants during the study.

## Interviews

The interviews were semi-structured and lasted about an hour each. The first few questions were background questions, such as how old you were when you first started working in restaurants, what positions did you hold while working in a restaurant, can you describe the building and the approximate number of staff and customers that would be there in a night. Then the questions moved into the more sensitive topic of sexual harassment and explaining their experiences with sexual harassment and the way sexual harassment would have been dealt with at that restaurant.

## Sample

In the end four women -- Samantha, Jenny, Katy and Ellen[1] -- were interviewed for this study. Guest et al. (2006) believes that samples as small as four can provide accurate information with a high confidence level. All of the women had quit at least one restaurant job and moved to another restaurant at some point in their career. The women ranged in ages from 20 to 26 the last time they worked in a restaurant. Samantha and Jenny had one restaurant in common that was located on a busy highway and had a large number of staff member and customers. Katy and Ellen had one restaurant in common that was smaller and located in a busy mall. All four women worked at a minimum one restaurant in Alberta. Their starting ages in restaurants raged from 14 to 22, which means that their experience levels were different. Some individuals had been in the restaurant industry for over ten years and others just over two years. Their roles in the industry were different as well, one was a waitress, two were waitresses and bartenders, and one was a shift leader, bartender and waitress. These women held these positions in the restaurant for at least one year for it to be considered in the study. Guest et al. (2006) also state that lower sample sizes are reasonable if the researcher is understanding common perceptions and experiences.

## Data Analysis

A common way to analyze qualitative data is to code data into themes (Saldana, 2016). A code is considered to be an inquiry of words or short phrases that symbolically assigns a word to language-based data (Saldana, 2016). This project used NVivo 12 for coding. NVivo is a computer program that allows for coding of multiple documents and will group phrases from

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[1] All participant names reported here are pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

different interviews if the themes are identified as the same. It is unlikely that a person will get the codes right the first time so normally there are multiple rounds of coding done (Saldana, 2016). This study was similar in the fact that there were multiple rounds of coding. Coding themes start to emerge in the data, which then can be turned into categories (Saldana, 2016). This study uses the themes and categories to understand the phenomenon of sexual harassment in the restaurant industry.

## Results/ Discussion

### Staff Members

#### *Attitudes among the staff*

Each restaurant differed in the atmosphere that existed between the coworkers. Some restaurants were negative, others were neutral, and others were positive. Katy and Ellen both described their common restaurant as having a negative atmosphere. Katy and Ellen both described the work environment between staff members as being "hostile." Staff members being hostile towards each other can lead to sexual harassment in the workplace (Mathisen et al., 2008). Katy worked at another restaurant and described the atmosphere between staff members as being "it's like a good work environment but sometimes it's very moody." Samantha had a similar experience as Katy at her first restaurant. Samantha described the work environment as "usually pretty good but we definitely had some catty moments." Samantha and Jenny both described the restaurant they had in common by saying, "Everyone was friends or at least acquaintances."

#### *Sexual harassment among the staff*

According to Mathisen et al. (2008) the restaurant with the most negative attitude towards each other would be the restaurant most likely to have sexual harassment. This study found that is not that case but in fact the restaurant where everyone was friends or at least acquaintances was the restaurant that had sexual harassment among staff members. All the other restaurants the women were not sexually harassed by another staff member. A personal experience of sexual harassment by a staff member was given by Jenny:

> "The only other thing that I went through that was really bad was getting involved with a manager outside of work. Then that not working out and that manager made my life an absolute living hell because of that. It was like calling me or texting under the pretenses of work kind of thing and then it would get carried right into like more of a sexual nature or what are you doing or talking about a relationship which I had absolutely no interest in. If I didn't play along and follow the suit outside of work my work day was a living hell. There was nobody I could have gone to about that because I knew I had crossed a line in the first place by getting involved with a manager and second of all that 9 times out of 10 that person was the highest one that was there."

This statement explains how lines can get blurred between coworkers and what ending a relationship can turn into. The manager would call her for work and then turn into a sexual conversation that Jenny did not want to take part in. If she did not take part in the sexual

aspect, then the manager would punish her at work. Even though Jenny made the decision to become involved with the manager when she broke it off, he kept making sexual advances towards her. This shows that the manager was abusing their power over Jenny, which Mathisen et al. (2008) found that the majority of sexual harassment in restaurants is someone in a position of power. Jenny also describes another incident of sexual harassment:

> "We had a lot of staff members, in particular I can think of one in management that was very grabby and weird and didn't have any boundaries. Was it something that you know really stuck with me and bothered me? No. But then that was also a drinking buddy."[2]

This statement goes to show that there were issues with more than one manager who would cross the line and sexually harass staff members. Even though she said personally it did not bother her, it might have bothered other staff members.  This statement also indicates that a manager was abusing their position of power to sexually harass staff members.

### Why did sexual harassment occur in the restaurant where everyone was friendly?

Even though everyone was friendly at this one restaurant there were other things involved, which lead to the sexual harassment. Jenny explains in these next two quotes what else happened behind the scenes at this restaurant:

> "It was a basically party central everybody was friends, drinking buddies or acquaintances outside of work.  So, you would go into work hungover get off work and go upstairs to the bar and drink there until the rest of the people got off. Then party with the same people that you work with and do it all again the next day."

> "There were times that you drank the less or went out the least was your days off.  Once you were there you weren't just there to work, you were there for the after party."

These two quotes explain that even though everyone was friendly they would also all go out drinking together after every shift. Not separating work friends from the friends that you go out drinking with every night can lead to the lines being crossed. Chia-Jeng & Kleiner (2001) had a similar finding where the staff had a special bond because they worked evening and weekends together, which lead to lines being crossed and sexual harassment taking place. The current study shows a similar thing happen. Jenny did explain that the manager who sexually harassed her would often go out with the staff member after work as well. The manager joining in with the partying is probably what led to the relationship in the first place and once Jenny decided she did not want to be involved anymore, it turned into sexual harassment. This is just one personal experience of what kind of sexual harassment can happen between staff members in a restaurant.

### Customers

The restaurants ranged in size from about 85 customers to about 250 customers, which means the number of customers at a time would be different among the restaurants. Even though the

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[2] This was edited for clarity.

number of customers differed, one thing that all the women agreed on was that sexual harassment from customers does happen. Ellen said that sexual harassment happened "every shift" to her. Both Katy and Jenny said that sexual harassment happened "about once a week" to them. Samantha did not give a number but said that she noticed it more often at the second restaurant than the first. This shows that there is no dispute about sexual harassment happening in these four women's restaurants but the amount it happens can differ. Jenny and Samantha both said that sexual harassment happens more often in the bar than in the restaurant part of the establishment. Ellen works at restaurant that has more of a pub atmosphere and she is sexually harassed more often than the other three women. The common denominator is alcohol. Alcohol is more involved in the bar and the pub than in the family restaurant. Jenny said, "the biggest thing was having alcohol involved." Powers and Leili (2016) determined that a risk factor at a bar for sexual assault was intoxication. This study seems to provide further evidence that intoxication – with its attendant reduction of both inhibition and judgment -- can lead to sexual harassment between a customer and a staff member.

### Verbal and physical sexual harassment

Another commonality between the four women was that they had all been verbally sexually harassed by a customer. All four women explained at least one personal experience of verbal sexual harassment that stood out to them. This study identified that physical sexual harassment is not as common as verbal sexual harassment. Three of the four girls identified being physically sexually harassed by a customer at one point in their waitressing careers. The severity between the verbal and psychical sexual harassment was different among all four of the women even though there was a common restaurant between Katy and Ellen and a different common restaurant between Jenny and Samantha. Their personal experiences of sexual harassment led to three main themes; sexual orientation, customers abusing power, and sexuality.

### Sexual Orientation

Sexual harassment about sexual orientation was a theme in two of the interviews:

> "I was just talking to the table as I normally would and one of them asked me on a date. I was like no thank you I'm actually dating a woman we're really happy. He responded with well I would fuck you better than she would any day." (Katy)[3]

> "I would be bartending, and guys would ask me out. I would say oh I am dating a girl, and they would always make comments I'd fuck you better or I'd be the right guy for you." (Ellen)

Both of their stories of sexual harassment involved a bias about their sexual orientation. For some reason the men that had asked them out felt the need to tell them in a vulgar way that they are making the wrong choice in dating a woman. This was an interesting finding in because there was no previous literature on sexual harassment about a person's sexual orientation.

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[3] This was edited for clarity.

### Customers using power

The severity of sexual harassment can be different Ellen said, "just like comments as small as' hey smile.' If I would have a guy bartending next to me, they would never say that."[4] This could also be from the idea that the customer has power over the server (Yagil, 2008). Ellen felt that being asked to smile was the customer exercising power over her and made her feel uncomfortable. The restaurant industry is known for making customers happy, so the customer believes that it is okay to make comment like this at waitresses (Yagil, 2008). Customers abusing their power can also happen in the form of physical sexual harassment as Samantha describes a group of men out for lunch:

> "Suddenly, like halfway through their meal I went to turn around and one of them actually pinched my butt. He said don't worry there will be more later. I kind of went away and I was flustered but I was kind of like okay what happened? The senior server that I was serving with said that can be expected and that these guys come in often."[5]

This statement from Samantha shows that some customers abuse their power often and think that touching a waitress is okay because they have never been asked to stop before.

### Sexuality

According to Yagil (2008) sexual attractiveness and flirtation are often seen as part of the job. Allowing customers to believe that sexual attractiveness is part of the restaurant industry leads to sexual harassment. Samantha's personal experience helps to show how customers can cross the line and think that a waitress is a sexual being:

> "I was the daytime bar, which is the bartender during the day normally 11 am-4 pm. I was doing my opening everything seemed fine. I had a few customers sitting around the bar and then I had two gentlemen come up. There was a younger guy and an older gentleman. They told me they were both construction workers and they were celebrating because the younger guy passed something, or he was just being treated out by the boss because he was doing such a good job. The first few rounds of drinks everything seemed fine nothing seemed like it would really blow up. Then as soon as they got a few shots in them. The younger gentlemen wanted a tequila shot and then requested to lick the salt off of my neck and take the lime from my mouth. Yeah, that one was pretty bad."[6]

Samantha's experience shows that the customer believed she would do something sexual because she was a waitress. This person demonstrates that some customers believe that waitresses are sexual objects and are willing to do anything. This be

These four personal experiences just go to show that something as small as requesting a smile could be considered sexual harassment. The four women had different stories but Ellen and

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[4] This was edited for clarity.
[5] This was edited for clarity.
[6] This was edited for understanding.

Katy both had stories involving their sexual orientation, which is interesting because that was not something found in previous literature.

## Management

A commonality that emerged was that most management did nothing if sexual harassment occurred.   Ellen said that "no, you were never backed up by your managers". Jenny said that "I never had anybody specifically that I went to or felt like I could go to". Not having mangers do anything about sexual harassment was also prominent in other studies (Chia-Jeng & Kleiner, 2001; Williams et al. 1999). The literature suggests two reasons for managers not stepping in: (1) because they did not know they needed to; and (2) the behaviour is considered normal (Chia-Jeng & Kleiner, 2001; Williams et al. 1999). The behaviour being considered normal was something this study indicated. Samantha said

> "That it was kind of expected that like if you were going to work in the restaurant industry. Then you did had to have a tough skin because people constantly bashing you with either mean comments or comments like that [sexual comments]".

This statement shows that the behaviour is normalized in the restaurant industry. She learned that from the first restaurant she went to and carried that throughout her career. Something interesting that was discovered in this study that some managers did not believe the girls even if they did tell a manager. Jenny described this as the "girl who cried wolf". This shows that the behaviour is normalized and that managers do not take the issue of sexual harassment seriously, especially if they are not listening to the complaint.

Although some managers did not seem to care about sexual harassment in the restaurant, other managers did. Katy describes her manager "Pulled [the customer] aside and made him formally apologize to me and if were to treat any other like worker like that then he would no longer be allowed in the establishment." This manager took the complaint Katy made seriously and showed the customer that it is not okay to sexually harass the waitresses. Samantha also describes a situation where she was very uncomfortable where she "actually went to the general manager that was working that day and he came up talked to them; they paid their bill and left". This statement also shows the general manager of this restaurant listened to the complaint, believed the server and took action. He actually made the individuals pay and leave for sexually harassing a waitress. This goes to show that not all managers are bad and believe that getting sexual harassed is normal in the restaurant industry. There are some managers who will stand up for their staff if they are told about the situation.

## Reasons Servers Put Up with Sexual Harassment

### Just part of the Job

The idea that sexual harassment is simply a part of the server's job seems to be a common belief among servers. Samantha states that "A lot of people that I worked with was like, 'yeah it's to be expected; just get some tough skin and you'll get over it'". Jenney responded with "yes 100%" to the question about believing if sexual assault is just part of the job. Just part of

the job refers to when sexual harassment happens in the restaurant industry and waiters and waitresses are supposed to accept it. Katy responded to the same question with "It is definitely is part of it". Ellen responded with "It's become part of the culture". All of the girls stated that they believe it is considered part of the job. Some of the girls believe that it should not be, but it is. This just shows how embedded sexual harassment is in the restaurant industry. Waitresses seem to not be shocked when sexual harassment happens to them and this could because they mentally prepare for it to happen. This finding is similar to Weber et al. (1995) because the restaurant workers had a different threshold for sexual harassment, which could be from the it's-just-part-of-the job mentality.

### Tips

Another common reason why waitresses put up with sexual harassment is because of the tips. Matukewica (2015) found that when the customer is the one controlling the tip then the waitress or waiter is going to put up with more to get that tip. Tips are very important to waitresses. Until recently, waiters and waitresses would make less than minimum wage in Canada because they were expected to be getting tips (Matukewica, 2015). One thing that most people do not understand is that the server has to share the tips with other staff members (e.g. cooks, dishwashers, managers, hosts, bussers, and bartenders) so the waitress wants to maximize the tip so she can keep a portion of it (Matukewica, 2015). Another common misconception is that if a table does not tip then the waitress or waiter does not split the tip with anyone else. Most restaurants base the number of tips getting split on their overall sales not on how much of a tip the waiter or waitress made (Matukewica, 2015). Samantha stated that after one of the sexual harassment incidents she questioned "is it okay for this person to do this just because they are tipping me?" In the end she did go along with it and did not report the incident to a manager. Ellen states" you know you're going to give up your tip to stand up for yourself." Both of these statements show that part of the reason why waitresses put up with sexual harassment is because they think they are going to get a tip afterwards, so they are willing to put up with more.

### Possible Solutions

Chia-Jeng & Kleiner (2001) recommend implementing sexual harassment policies and making sure all the staff member know the policy. This would include training for all staff members working for the company. Samantha stated that

> "I guess training for example, if somebody is going the sexual harassment or sexual assault route and is making you uncomfortable you shouldn't be scared to go talk to your manager or go talk to the supervisor that's on duty."[7]

This statement is consistent with previous research that recommends there should be training on sexual harassment in the service industry. This statement shows that the managers should be willing to listen and help when a staff member has been sexually harassed.

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[7] This was edited for understanding.

### *Female Management*

Ellen and Katy both had similar ideas that having a "female general manager" would help because they can actually relate to what you're going through.  Katy stated that, "for my work the general manager decided that we need a female supervisor because we are all female and he couldn't relate to us in that aspect of things, so he hired one. So she's like our person if we need anything."[8] This would be a good step because the female general manager likely would have gone through similar situations when she was starting in the restaurant industry. Having a female there would allow for more waitresses to feel comfortable with telling management about a sexual harassment experience and feeling like they would be believed.

### *Mixing social life and work life*

Chia-Jeng &Kleiner (2001) found that restaurant industry personnel mix their social and work lives because of the evening and weekend hours. Jenny stated

> "I think that that people need to be a lot more strict with the staff members: (a) drinking on the clock:  (b) drinking at the place they work after hours; and (c) drinking together period, blurring lines between management and staff members, or even staff members together."[9]

This statement shows that being social with other staff members has caused problems of crossing lines and that if there was not as much of a social aspect then maybe the sexual harassment between staff members would not be as prevalent.

## Limitations and Future Research

### Limitations

The main limitation to this research is the number of participants. Possibly if there were more participants then new themes would have emerged in the data. It is unclear if there was data saturation in this project because of the low number of participants. Another limitation to this study was that five participants dropped out of the study because they were on a contract that would not allow them to participate in research. Unfortunately, I was not able to see the contract in person. This could have been an excuse from the manager because he was scared of what could be reviled if his waitresses participated. If I had more time, I would have liked to see the contract and see if there was a clause that did not allow for research. The last limitation to this project was a time constraint. This study was completed as part of a requirement for a qualitative methods class, which was only four months long. If there was more time for this project more participants could have been found. If there were more participants, then possibly I could have found waitresses that had never been sexually harassed at work. It would have also been interesting to interview waiters to see if they have similar or different experience when it comes to sexual harassment.

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[8] This was edited for understanding.
[9] This was edited for understanding.

## Future Research

There is room for more research in the area of sexual harassment in the restaurant industry, especially in Canada. It would be interesting to see if there is a difference among sexual harassment in countries where tipping is normalized, countries where tipping is taboo, or countries where the tip is included. It would also be interesting to do more research in the area of sexual orientation. The LGBTQ+ community is growing, and people are being more comfortable with being open about their sexuality, which could cause more customers to comment on their sexual orientation or even gender identity in a sexual harassing way. This would be something worth researching in more depth. Further research should be done on addressing the differences of men and women's sexual harassment. There may be waitresses and waiters being sexual harassed by women who do not think of it as sexual harassment because it came from a woman and not a man. There are many other interesting studies that could be done on sexual harassment and the restaurant industry.

## Conclusion

This study was a qualitative study on sexual harassment in the restaurant industry. This study hypothesis was that all four of the women interviewed would have their own sexual harassment story even though they differ in age. This was true all of the women shared at least one story of either verbal or physical harassment. This study also hypothesised that sexual harassment will be normalized by the interviewees because of the restaurant industry culture. This hypothesis was also correct all four of the women stated that this was part of the job and they normalized it because they were getting paid. This study has shown that there is a problem in the restaurant industry with individual beliefs about what constitutes sexual harassment and that there needs to be changes done in order for this mentality to be changed. It does seem like some restaurants are starting to change the mentality and some managers are sticking up for their servers if a sexual harassment indecent does occur. This study has enlightened the normalcy around sexual harassment in the restaurant industry and hopefully some changes can come from the research.

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# Understand Where We Went Wrong: A Content Analysis Comparing Two "Year(s) of the Gun" in Toronto

## Kevin Siery

**Abstract.** The current research is a content analysis comparing the discourse of gun violence. The sample used for the study contained 182 newspapers combined from the years 2005 and 2018 from Toronto Star collect through ProQuest Canadian Newsstream. The basis of pulling-lever strategies was used to discuss the changes in the framing media's projections on newspapers. The results supported a change of failed levers pulled and the continued stigmatization of minority communities.

## Introduction

Canada has not been immune to gun violence in its streets. Often Canada compares our crime to that of cities in the United States as we both fit similar Western ideals for laws. Gun and gang violence have been studied for almost a century beginning with Thrasher's 1927 work in Chicago. Firearms have held a large portion of homicides since the 1990's and new strategies are constantly evolving (Braga, 2008; MacGarrell, Chermak, Wilson, & Corsaro, 2006). Communities have voiced concerns and media often is used as a tool to create pressure for changes.

We have examined the changes the United States has implemented and have adopted some of these changes to address the violence in Canada. According to Statistics Canada, the percentage of homicides in Canada with a connection to gang violence has grown from 24% to 42% between the years of 2000-2018 (Statistics Canada, 2020). Gun violence in Canada resulted in 224 homicides in 2005 (Dauvergne & Li, 2005), compared to 249 homicides in 2018 (Statistics Canada, 2020). In Canada's largest city of Toronto, there were 262 shootings in 2005 and 428 in 2018 (Toronto Police Service, 2020). The prevalence of violence in Canadian communities it is important to continue to monitor the changes in criminal behavior to provide safer cities. Police are pulling the levers of what type of enforcement strategies to address the targeted behaviour of gun violence with different social agencies and people's involvement (Braga, 2008, 2012; MacGarrell et al., 2006). Simultaneously, there were increased media releases regarding gun violence reporting on the root causes of crimes as well as where the solution is found. In the city of Toronto, media agencies like the Toronto Star dubbed 2005 the first year of the gun as it reached new spike of homicides. Gun violence reached a peak spike again in 2018 which was named the year of the gun in media again. Newspaper outlets are gatekeepers of information and can purposely or inadvertently label the shootings and all individuals involved. Common themes among gang research on violence and gang membership (as guns in incidents are

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studied with gang members) are lack of community support, lack of government support, gang behavior, individual characteristics (e.g. mental illness). Although these blames have been recognized in research for a century, having an adaptive formal control is often difficult to implement. Media calls for a wide range of solutions to gun violence and those perpetrators.

## Media Influence

There has been some research on the influence media has on the responses from police to gain cooperation from society (Dirikx & Van den Bulck, 2014; Feinberg, 2002; Graziano, Schuck, & Martin, 2010). The events are portrayed in newspapers or other mediums influence community members opinions and can also influence the strategies police respond with. Social constructionism would posit, like other mediums, media is a conduit for a social problem to be perceived in the public to raise legitimate concern (Graziano et al., 2010). More positive constructions of policing efforts can increase the cooperation and image of the police as studies have shown when testing police cooperation (Dirikx & Van den Bulck, 2014). Other research has shown mitigating factors towards police opinion; however, problem neighbourhoods do tend to have more articles discussing police inefficiencies (Dowler, 2002). As previous literature in discourse of media and gun violence, stereotyping and agenda setting is an expected bias as an outcome from the journalists (Gorham, 2006; Parham-Payne, 2014). Analyzing the differences in framing and labelling of two years of spikes of gun violence can shed light on the effects of media. The opinion of the articles can both help gain public support to effective solutions or undermine the long-term goals of gun violence prevention.

## Current Study

The current study will critically analyze media discourse on the issue of gun violence as both the framing themes of blame and solution. Specifically, the paper will compare two "year[s] of the gun" in the city of Toronto, Canada to identify these patterns and compare the policy or policing suggestions or changes. There are two major research questions examined from the data: 1) "How does the media frame the blame to gun violence between 2005 and 2018?" and 2) "Have the solutions from 2005 been resolved/have made improvements upon in 2018?".

Previous literature will help guide the prediction of typical blame portrayed from the lens of a journalist as mentioned before. The purpose of this analysis is to identify the common themes of the discourse of the issue of gang violence and compare the years to identify solutions or continued inefficiencies as identified by the media. Consistent with previous literature, we can hypothesize the blame for gun violence in 2005 will be placed on individuals, which in turn will lead to a call for stricter penalties to decrease gun violence (Gorham, 2006; Parham-Payne, 2014). Through analyzing the over decade gap of crime, the research of discourse can identify overt and covert stereotyping of offender groups and the community's violence is commonly present. The goal will also to find what issues have remained the same and not changed in society.

## Methodology

### Researcher perspective

Confirmation bias should be a concern for most researchers as it may interfere with properly analyzing the discourse of a statement (Bogaard, Meijer, Vrij, Broers, & Merckelback, 2014). Studies of discourse analysis have expressed the need for acknowledgment of biases of how to conduct the research as well as interpreting the meaning of literature (Rogers & Schaenen, 2014).

Although past experiences can influence a researcher to be critical of aspects of a result, they must be cognisant of potential biases. The reader should be aware the writer has experience in multiple angles regarding the issue of gun violence in Toronto. Working in the field directly provides unique insight to experiences of other workers and clients which shape expectations of roots of violence or where solutions should be found. This may suggest the writer would want to find a holistic working solution in the future. However, holistic models are difficult to operationalize for gang prevention (Wong, Gravel, Bouchard, Descormiers, & Morselli, 2016). These are also only a difference between spiked years and the pattern may continue once again for a spiked year next decade presenting new challenges from holistic views. The purpose of the paper is also to identify how labels have historically changed in identifying how Toronto media has blamed gun violence and how reduce gun violence. Opinions were categorized for each article and reviewed by a third party for consistency.

### Data

The data used for this study was selected solely from *The Toronto Star* newspaper: (1) to compare where blame for gang violence in from 2005 and 2018; and (2) to explore strategies and solutions that were employed in 2005 and 2018. This newspaper was used for the accessibility to people in the Greater Toronto Area and the largest news outlet. The project involved capturing articles in two waves, the first wave of 2005 and the second 2018 utilizing a keyword search. ProQuest Canadian Newsstream database is open source[1] and captured the newspaper articles that the test revolved around. The study was limited to only these two years of a gun due to the spike of violence depicted on the news. 2005 is often referred to as the first year of the gun through all media outlets as large debates on the gun violence stemmed from the news articles that year (Davis, 2017). The violence in 2005 grew from the 1990s despite being named one of the safest cities in North America (Ezeonu, 2010). As a result, the year was given its name because of its rarity in increased violence at the time. As such the method of criterion sampling was implemented which allowed cases that related solely to the topic of gun violence in the city of Toronto (Palys, 2008). A keyword search was done to locate articles pertaining strictly to gun violence. This search resulted in 138 articles but filtering for duplicates and further reduced the sample to 97 articles. The initial search for 2018 resulted in 117 results

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[1] Due to the nature of open-source content that has no reasonable expectation to privacy, the current study is exempt from Research Ethics Approval and review under s. 7.3 of the Simon Fraser University Research Ethics Review.

in total, which was reduced after the same filtering to 85 articles. The accepted total of articles was 172.

## Analytic Strategy

Directed content analysis was used to approach an issue, in this study gun violence, from a theoretical framework (Hsiefh & Shannon, 2005). This study created coding schemes based of readings of abstracts and risk factors from Public Safety Canada (National Crime Prevention Centre, 2018). The abductive approach will test the patterns written on the events from Toronto, the rest of Canada, and in the United States. The end of the paper will discuss these 'solutions' to gun crime in the context of how those parties are responding to the problem with gun violence.

The two themes of focus as discussed will first go through are: (1) where the blame for gun violence is laid; and (2) where perspective solutions are identified. Codes for blame were: Community, Gangs, Gun Culture, Laws. Codes for solutions include: Community, Social Agencies, Legislation, Police. Following the coding of the main themes, other themes became more present like blame on certain groups of people.

## Results

Studies have shown papers to be influenced on their opinions of police, policy makers, to even racial constructs (Feinberg, 2002; Graziano et al., 2010). The current study found some mixed results on the impact of newspapers, but also found the shift in language used to describe those involved with the crime. The blame for gun violence between years were met with strategies used to address issues which undermined some long-term solutions. The labels placed from media and 13 years passing created some bigger gaps identified in 2018 papers.

### Blame for gun violence

The generalizing of actors of crime can often lead to "othering" and creating separation with stigmatization in cities. Codes for blame were set to identify the blame but to catch any stigmatizing language towards certain people. Effects from media can cause negative annotations to groups of people resultant from labelling and sensationalizing crime applying labelling theory to the issue (Becker, 1963).

#### Communities failure

Articles that placed blame in communities resulted as a decrease of theme between 2005 and 2018 (see Table 1 below; 2005: n = 36, 2018: n = 8). Entering the study, the researcher expected the shift as a blame to change from specific communities and/or the flaws of community networks from letting people slip through the cracks. The trend was confirmed through numbers, however the 2018 articles supported many of the same claims of 2005.

**Table 1: Frequency of thematic nodes**

| Major Thematic Node | Sub-node | Frequency of References (2005) | Frequency of References (2018) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Blame | Community | 42 | 15 |
| | Culture | 62 | 34 |
| | Gangs | 38 | 28 |
| | Individuals | 31 | 11 |
| Solution | Social Agencies | 18 | 27 |
| | Police | 35 | 23 |
| | Community | 45 | 37 |
| | Legislative Recommendations | 31 | 39 |

The articles that identify communities as the blame for violence write from an angle of class conflict. A common concern was community housing where shootings often took place and resulted in young black men as victims. The low socio-economic disadvantaged communities are compounded from the plethora of different issues in the same space. A display of this commentary can be first brought the after a homicide occurred at an anti-violence barbeque outside of public housing:

> "Lives here have long been rough and brutal for many. Within the crumbling walls of these public housing complexes, there is poverty, drug addiction, mental illness, fatherless children, malnutrition, tension with police, weapons and violence" (article 48, 2005).

The article continues to further represent social housing and the flaws from the living conditions. Not only with the condition of landlords failing to make repairs in the specific apartments, the members quoted suggest elsewhere in the community for solutions. A common subtheme between articles discuss the support of segregation and concern for black community members as both the victim and offender. The blame of these communities failing to be safe are attributed to the lack of job opportunities. An incident of a rising basketball prospect and shooting victim quoted the family blaming jealousy of economic disparity in the community (article 30, 2015).

When discussing the community, the theme was consistently discussed with culture as well in the article. It should be noted that articles regarding communities repeatedly recognized black community activists for comments and quotes on the matter. The tone was contrasting putting blame on the community members, subsequently the community members placed blame on the lack of support. One article discussed the views of Toronto City Councillor who expressed a war on gangs is required to police the communities even if it requires targeting young black men (article 26, 2005).

In contrast, 2018 had a considerably lower count for articles containing themes of communities as a root of gun violence. It should be noted that in 2017, policy addressed carding in Ontario banned the tool. Carding was a police investigative tool which was found to target black community members and weakening the trust between the community and police. The previous two years of newspapers discussed racially motivated policing which may have contributed to decrease in blame on communities. Instead communities collectively addressed the issue was a more common theme for community as discussed in the solutions. Resultant from 2005, 2018 still used the Review of the Roots of Violence report to highlight how to bring communities assistance rather than othering communities (article 120, 2018). Instead of a link to ethnic groups of people like in 2005, journalists began putting blames on the gangs inside the communities. Media's representation over 13 years changed the perspective of communities as the source of violence, to neighbourhoods suffering from criminal groups within. Although this would confirm the hypothesized change in trend, the previous 2 years criticizing carding may have influenced the writer's position on community.

## *Culture*

Culture is a very broad theme which was categorized by subthemes and three nodes: ethnicity, gun culture, and gang culture. The beginning of 2005 much like 2018 focussed on the gun culture incidents and effects from the United States of America and other countries. Gun culture in 2005 was spoken more of just the physical presence that without guns crime would be less likely to occur. By October of 2018 community members have marked 41 homicides to gun violence alone and 90% involving black individuals. The idea that gun violence is heavily connected to gang violence with victims reported as young black men. One of the more interesting and overtly racist quotes from 2005 regarding the culture of people was:

> "The Toronto police are paralyzed by political correctness - unwilling to target the largely black gangs that are perpetrating most of the shootings. They can only mouth platitudes while innocent people are murdered on the streets" (article 108, 2005).

Not only does this quote reflect the targeting of gang members who are "pre-dominantly black" as the opinion stated, it instills fear in the black community from being targeted by police. Further articles on targeting theses neighbourhoods of "young black crime" should have enforcement tactics like R.I.D.E. (roadside program for drunk driving) (article 96, 2005). Labelling of families in these communities of not having the "appropriate number of children" further stigmatizes those in the area stereotyping these communities (article 50, 2005). Fewer articles were able to represent black community members to speak on the concerns of the jump to enforcement measures rather than the lack of preventative measures. The articles that had quotes from activists to point to other issues lack of job opportunities and overrepresentation in jail systems.

2018 started with mass shootings in Florida followed by Toronto witnessing their own mass shooting and mass homicide. Mass shootings began shaping the narrative of gun culture as an issue with faith groups. It also was driven that the gun culture in America is driving gun culture in Canada which should be explored. Articles debated the topic of a handgun ban and having

stronger enforcement on the border. Gun culture has pointed to the border to being weak on enforcement identified in the following quote:

> "Handguns are now easy to bring across the border from the U.S., where there is daily carnage, and are easy to buy, hide, carry and use. It's not a Canada I recognize. The first responsibility of government is to protect citizens from violent death" (article 198, 2018).

This article, as did others, spoke on more than just a gang shootout resulting in kids dying in crossfire, to the Danforth shooting[2], to other homicides. The focus became more of an issue of the technology and the availability to get into the wrong hands. The portrayal of gun violence was that to invoke a pandemic of uncontrollable violence. It should be noted that gun culture blamed the border's weak enforcement and to the same degree in both 2005 and 2018.

## *Individuals*

Predispositions and environmental factors contribute to individual's risk of committing violence in the community. Articles from 2005 portrayed individuals through their traumatic past which fueled their want for a gun. The labels placed on individuals were not educated to the same degree as 2018 on mental health topics. Literature of that time had yet to provide a greater understanding of mental health in the community, as gun users were referenced having mental problems. In general, 2005 discussed the matters of the individuals failing to have community supports to assist with employment and activities as a youth. There was one outlier to the common theme of individual risk factors, as the call for targeting immigrants. As discussed in other themes, this article discussed overtly the idea to segregate schools due to the larger risk factors for those individuals (article 87, 2005).

Labels and context for mental health spoke on past trauma through more appropriate terms, however the message remained the same unlike what was predicted. Gun violence stems from those who experienced this trauma as the youth. The only difference in identifying blame was the tone of the article laid heavily on screening for purchasing a gun. The Danforth shooting prompted this discussion from portraying the mass shooter as a lost cause from youth. Trauma was also a word due to describe the survivors of violence and the repercussions of the:

> "…fear and PTSD - disproportionately impacts poorer, racialized communities, places where there are fewer opportunities, strained relationships with police, fewer services, higher rates of unemployment, and young people vulnerable to the allure of gangs - and guns" (article 189, 2018).

The quote highlights the general opinion in both 2005 and 2018 that offenders of gun crimes experience trauma and are forgotten by society which lead to the violence. The blame shown in 2018 will introduce the required solutions need to come from a community view with assistance of government agencies. The findings would argue that there was not change of the trend of individual risk factors as a root for gun violence.

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[2] The Danforth shooting is categorized as one of the most prolific mass shootings in Canada (article 198, 2018)

In 2005, journalists often tied themes of gun violence from gang members as a by-product of inefficient police. The idea of machoism and lack of financial support were identified as the root of membership. Both ideas have been around as a root for violence for almost a century (Thrasher, 1927). Articles focused on the individuals that joined the gangs rather than the gang being violent. The blame and label are placed solely on these troubled individuals to carry the burden of being the problem. After placing the label, solutions we discussed on how to control the individuals better as that was the issue. These individuals that committed crimes should be the ones targeted in the papers to help the individual:

> "The enemy is not from the outside, the enemy is within, where blind eyes are being turned to youngsters who are in gangs; where mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers and friends continue to let the guilty walk free rather than having the guts to give them up. In giving the guilty up you just might save their lives and allow them to become productive members of society" (article 74, 2005).

In 2018 gang violence was discussed often from the incident involving two young girls killed from crossfire. As discussed, previously was the issue of carding which strained the relationship of individuals and police. Carding was supposed to be used as an investigative tool to target police which became common practice in high crime areas after 2005. Journalists describe this issue was shifted from how to police individuals, to how to police gang culture. Much like in 2005 when quotes from community members asked for assistance with poverty, this is now a consensus among papers as the root of violence. It would suggest that the authors now point to how the community can assist the culture by trying to remove risk factors. 2018 articles that discussed the same issues as 2005 would be differentiated through talking about gangs rather than individual gang members.

## Solutions

The solutions of gun violence were the second measure of thematic change. Prior to coding four major themes were identified as common strategies presented from society to reduce crime. The solutions to gun violence will follow the theoretical basis of lever pulling strategies by the police. Media can label events and individuals which change over time regarding a same issue. Although newspapers reflect their views, it often shapes the reader who is not personally affected by the issue.

### *Social Agencies*

Social agencies will be discussed as community systems of institutions of health, welfare, and rehabilitation (Pam, 2013). Social agencies are not a new concept of 2005, but social agencies are not perfect in replacing all the shortcoming of communities. Often agencies rely on grants and funding from the government and other donations. Social agencies are often a responsive action to community needs; however it is rare to assess community needs prior to opening. In 2005 and 2018 demonstrated a need for social agencies in similar light. Articles focused on a lack of funding which made it challenging to meet the needs of communities. The difference.

The difference of 2005 was social agencies was met with both arguments of social agencies and tougher enforcement strategies. Often, articles would usually reference interviews and comments from community members, or community associations like the Black Law Enforcers. The issue as is suspected to forever continue in places like Cabbagetown or Wellesley:

> "...that kids are interested in participating in constructive, meaningful activities like sports, music, even attending the library - activities that have been made inaccessible to kids in neighbourhoods plagued by gun violence due to government cutbacks" (article 81, 2005).

The solution was to fix gun violence through constructive activities with youth to help shape the future. These diversion strategies were a trend that did not change throughout years. The strategies did not shift when it came to mention social agencies as a solution. The frequency of mentioning was the increase (2005 = 18, 2018 = 27). The communities that were discussed for this solution were directed at immigrated areas such as the Jamaican communities. Neighbourhoods are mentioned to commit more attention to areas of low socio-economic status and to those who speak English as a second language as they are not as financially stable. The Jamaican-Canadian Association was a voice to many articles recruiting support for innovative solutions to social agencies to assist in the job market.

2005 created may social agencies that targeted these communities and behaviour were at risk to gun violence. One social agency was 'Zero Gun Violence' built from community's members targeted my violence. The addressed many of the issues identified in the news from areas of economic, housing, and social/ethnic inequalities. The saturation of social agencies also became a talking point as the issues are still prevalent. Something to take from 2018 is the need for strategic evaluations of social agencies in communities (article 155, 2018). Gang prevention is a complicated effort that requires the individual buy-in and renouncement from violence to have access to the services. Correctional facilities play a greater role in 2018 to help facilitate services.

> "Successful community reintegration and improved employment prospects can help redirect those who repeatedly fall back into gun-related crime after serving time in prison" (article 177, 2018).

There are no outright dissenting views towards social agencies, only the preference for enforcement strategies. The message was similar between years with no significant change in how media viewed the effectiveness of social agencies have on gun violence.

### *Police Enforcement Strategies*

As hypothesized, police enforcement strategies are the greatest difference between the media's opinion from 2005 in contrast to 2018. The theme of enhancing police and enforcement strategies will encompass the sub-themes of acquiring more police, the directed presence of police, and the improvement of quality of officers. Many articles took positions on increased police presence and the effectiveness that police have reducing gun violence.

The year of 2005 had very polarized opinions on police enforcement strategies. The conflict arose from the 1990s and the strained relationship between officers and black community members from the increased policing efforts in those areas. The immediate solution for gun violence called for suppression tactics of increased physical presence in gang inflicted neighbourhoods. The response throughout the year focused on deployments to show the strictness of crime would result years later in stricter penalties in the court system as requested. The someone more divisive articles that shared the need for penalties voiced the concern for the over-representation of young black males incarcerated. In a sense it was more transparent on the issue, but also created a divide of opinions. One part of the article would dismiss the responsibility for over-incarceration as they were not is bad as the United States. 2005 also had way more outliers of overt racism supporting segregation from problem communities to others. The concern for racially profiling became very obvious from community members in those neighbourhoods stating:

> "The public sphere should not be in the business of enforcing or promoting segregation because it invariably works out to the disadvantage of segregated people" (article 69, 2005).

The emphasis of police enforcement strategies called for increased presence in the neighbourhood to increase arrests.

In 2018 police were still portrayed as the solution for eliminating gun violence but in a slightly different lens. The focus in 2018 is now discussed through the lens on how to improve justice on victims of minority, and in terms of enforcing communities without profiling or over enforcing minorities. Thirteen years later violence is still occurring in the same communities, but mistakes have been made to the level of policing. As mentioned earlier, after 2005 police started increasing the amount of physical presence and use of carding. The technique was meant for intelligence collecting in the community to build connections, but also to have better surveillance to have a faster response to crime. One article explored the options for stopping gun violence, they were sympathetic to the police officers' efforts stating:

> "Hot spots might be physical locations where many crimes happen, but there are also social hot spots. Policing social hot spots is much more difficult. Criminals are homophilous - they prefer to work with others who are like them, often ethnic or family kin. However, this makes it difficult to disentangle a sensible law enforcement focus on particular groups from (claims of) racism" (article 183, 2018).

The cutbacks on police officers left many officers worn out and a pitch for more funding to hire more officers was occurring again. The use of gun shot detection tools to assist with responding to crimes but removed as much presence. Funding from all levels of governments were increased in 2018, allowing money to go to police and social agencies. Although the narrative was given that policing was able to approach gun violence from a larger lens, there were many factors that influenced these stories. Thus it continues to have a more holistic approach to all facets as "gun violence and gang activity are complicated - socio-economic conditions, lack of

access to basic needs, limited education, lax gun control laws and easier access to weapons" (article 149, 2018). Carding and the increase of funding to allow a more holistic approach.

## *Legislative Recommendations*

Legislative reforms had the most even distribution of recommendations. Media's influence highlighting blame on all different parts often mention any or all three levels of government. The common themes of legislative recommendations will discuss the idea of banning handguns and weapons, stronger action from the Canadian Border Service Agency (CBSA), and stricter laws for all gun offences.

In 2005 media presented consistently that the laws and crown agencies are not strict letting this crime continue. The first contention of legislative changes to occur began with the then Toronto Police Chief stating half of the guns are smuggled from the south (article 15, 2015). Criticisms of the government were blaming the "undefended border" (article 15, 2015) and inconsistencies with the reports of the "Department of Justice found that 74.9 per cent of the firearms used in the commission of crimes are illegal guns smuggled into Canada, not the 50 per cent that is now claimed" (article 49, 2015). Media also took aim at the laws for bail requiring stiffer penalties for those violating gun crimes. Throughout the year, much support was given to the tough on crime approach. Minimal opposition was given in newspapers except for the few quotes from black community members cautioning on the harsher sentencing disproportionate amount of black people in jail. Of the 12 articles 75% of thematic arguments were in support of the ban. The remaining 25% were dissenting opinions on the ban claiming these are faulty attempts to punish legal gun owners. The opposition handgun ban often will blame this discussion as political posturing. Toronto Mayor at the time would say the "need to send a strong law-enforcement message that if you have a gun in Toronto, you'll be caught and you'll go to jail" (article 68, 2005).

The result from 2005 led to stricter penalties of gun-type offences, and greater policing measures. There was never an attempt to ban handguns after the election season. 2018 began the year with many school shootings in the United States. The conversation only became exponentially more common after the Danforth shooting resulting in two fatalities and thirteen injuries before the gunman took their own life (article 198, 2018). This incident was followed by two RCMP officers killed in a shootout in New Brunswick along with shootings throughout the summer in Toronto mostly gang-related (article 198, 2018). Bill C-71 was then drafted for the gun control legislation to tighten the rules on restricted firearm. However, as much support as some articles showed, the same support against a ban was made. Guns were slowly decreasing through illegal sales across the border, and more commonly sold from legal gun purchasers in Canada. The fuel for 2018 was the mothers and children slain from a commonly male offending crime. This stance on legislative recommendations highlights the motion from 2018 media's average thematic discussion:

> "Ottawa has put more money into fighting gun smuggling at the border and illegal weapons trafficking operations. But there are other restrictions that will help women. RCMP firearm licence applications used to require a cursory five-year background check

that partly relied on honest self-reporting. But a person who self-identifies as a paragon of good behaviour and mental health doesn't seek psychiatric treatment, even though they may be in crisis" (article 201, 2018).

Strengthening borders was a key discussion of 2018 but this topic again was argued from the same degree of 2005. The language used to describe the position was similar between the years and would not suggest any difference. The talks of banning guns were more prevalent in 2018 as guns from shootings were legally purchased in Canada. Injustice of the registry called for better screening in 2018 which was more common than 2005.

### *Community Members*

Social agencies, government legislation, and requests for funding all require buy in for community members for support. Community must be strong in their revitalization together to avoid another project pushing community members away due to raises in rent.

The blame in 2005 targeted minority neighbourhoods for being the cause of much of the violence in the city. Articles also quoted argument from how families were raised in the community. Labels were attached to parents of the neighbourhoods and their children building a narrative that was very divisive of the rest of Toronto and the area. The results of media influence were much less prevalent in 2005 due to the blame placed at the time on the members. Solutions from community members was more relied on other agencies helping individuals as they blamed everyone for failing youth. Those that spoke of community members trying to assist individuals associated with gun violence spoke from fear there was only a press opportunity. One of the articles explained:

> "While a multitude of programs have been proposed by the government (more police, tougher sentences, police wearing badges with their surnames, increased social funding), none of them focuses on the root cause of most gun violence systemic racism" (article 68, 2005).

Finding the solution to gun violence was not common in 2005. Instead the narrative was strongly associated with the need for better public housing and employment assistance. The only changes that were noted throughout the year were solutions for enforcement strategies.

The commentary shifted in 2018 for a collective response to bring the support directly from community members. Much like operations like ceasefire in Boston, people became more invested in being solutions to decreasing gun violence. Since 2005, reports of gang violence stayed constant in certain neighbourhoods as a part of neighbourhood (article 209, 2018). It also highlighted socio-economic disparity of these communities which received increased presence as requested in 2005. With legacies of gangs built in a neighbourhood they are the source of financial support to many young community members. Some individuals from those neighbourhoods are using their fame and influence to help support their communities. A famous director for hip-hop videos from Toronto was able to discuss the potential of working in community to build programs for youth as a community:

"parents and neighbourhoods, police, business people, mental health professionals, influencers in the entertainment and sports fields, and certainly political leaders all have important roles to play. The fact that the two of us - a filmmaker and a businessman - have committed to working together to find solutions is proof a multidisciplinary approach can work" (article 217, 2018).

This approach is one of many that were discussed in 2018 as community members and agency find police are not the long-term solution. The turmoil from carding between communities and agencies are one of many reasons why the lack of faith of community members looked inward to help decrease gang violence. This would support a change of how solutions to gun violence have shifted unlike some of the other identified solutions.

## Discussion

The purpose of the study was to explore changes of the labelling of blame and solutions for gun violence in the city of Toronto. The city of Toronto's media first named 2005 'The Year of the Gun" after 262 firearm occurrences (Toronto Police Service, 2020). The title was eventually placed upon the year of 2018 with 428 firearm occurrences (Toronto Police Service, 2020). These two years were anomalies for new heights of violence in the city, thus provoking a greater attention from media. The study explored two central questions (1) how does media place blame to the issue of gun violence? and (2) what were the requested and acted upon responses? Media has a unique role in society to report events that occur in our own community, but also provide a narrative to understanding the event. Media has been examined by literature to find influence on public perception and public policy with regards to gun violence (Altheide, 2003; Dowler, 2002; Gorham, 2006; Graziano et al., 2010; Parham-Payne, 2014). As the large proportions of gun violence repeated itself in 2018, it gave the unique opportunity to explore the media's influence and pulling lever strategy.

Pulling-lever strategies are consistently used by police to interact with the communities to develop strategies to reduce gun and gang violence (MacGarrell et al., 2006; Braga, 2008; Braga, 2012). The problem-oriented policing was evident in 2005 addressing blames to certain areas of the community. The common themes between years were community, culture, individuals, and gangs. The key findings gave considerable reports of homicides from a nonbiased position. From articles in 2005 were open about targeting black communities as much as the concern from community members in the neighbourhoods. Police reported to the news on the increased physical presence to those areas to make communities safer. Individuals were reports as people who did not get the support as children who needed stricter guidance. Social agencies and more government funding were the only solutions that had traction beyond enforcement strategies. Community was reported more as were the solution needs to be fixed but not the members that needed to be apart of the solution. The inclusion of minorities as the problem and the victims led to more police-oriented approaches that took were applied to the "war on crime".

Previous literature has explored mass shootings in America which would support the results from the changes of media framing resulting in greater panic for immediate solution (Jashinksy,

Magnusson, Hanson, & Barnes, 2017). As the numbers grew on homicides so did the frequency of published newspapers regarding gun violence. The end of each year also resulted in more strongly positioned takes. 2005 reported greater statements of overt racism to target ethnic minorities and new immigrants. The perception from media views would support notions that the need for greater police in those areas perpetuates the class conflict (Altheide, 2003). The concern for the failure of the government to control and support the community, culture, and individuals increased the fear of those joining gangs resulting in violence.

Thirteen years later many of the gaps of identified solutions were made present in the renewed need for long-term solutions. The trait of machoism in gang membership was a behaviour that needed to be addressed following 2018. Many supports were given to the Regent Park area which led to the removal of a historical gang but resulted in two gangs (which had an alliance) turning on each other (Urbanik, 2018). Gang culture trumped any social agency support or government funding applied to a heavily policed area (Urbanik, 2018). The tough on crime approach used from 2005 could not contain gun violence in the city. The turmoil from carding these targeted areas left the public not trusting police. This led to a more holistic view on solutions for crimes involving community members wanting to join the initiative to decrease gun violence. Individuals to blame for gun violence had more appropriate language, but again the time has become more aware of language used. This resulted in the change for blaming 'mental problems' to look for solutions on improving the steps to screen gun purchasers for using weapons for mass shootings. The start of each year also was heavily influenced on major shootings in America. Like Toronto, all of America had an increase of gun violence in schools.

## Limitations

All studies should be critically analyzed for generalizability and error in the study. It would be insufficient to generalize all newspapers to the likes of the Toronto Star a there are many other outlets for consumption beyond newspapers. Toronto Star was selected based of the popularity and copies distributed, however, the agency holds a centre-left political stance. The type of government in place during both years could have influenced the approaches to crime. The political stance of the paper remained the same to limit other influences on how Toronto placed blame and created solutions to crime. The thirteen-year gap provided growth in how people addressed community issues. Major events like carding and some programs created during the gap were identify. Biases from the interpretation from the research could also affected coding and analysis. The researcher's perspective presented areas where the research may have built opinions and expectations to change. However, the goal was to target how exactly did the language shift rather than macro-level solutions. The two years are also spiking which many other cities experience the level of panic (Jashinsky et al., 2017). Media is not the only influence on crime but provides a historic view on how society pushes for results (Altheide, 2003; Dirikx & Van den Bulck, 2014; Graziano et al., 2010; Parham-Payne, 2014). The completion of coding was entered solely from the researcher themselves over multiple waves. Likelihood for error is still present regardless of the safeties put in place.

## Conclusion

The current study supported the view of strategies and adjustments made from 2005 to 2018. However, many similar concerns were identified giving only some mixed results to the trend. The content analysis observed thematic patterns of journalist's placement of blame and calls for solutions. Some mixed results on although frequency of the topic may have increased over time, but some message was still presented the same in both years. The significance changes were in the manner of the article in creating divisive sides in 2005 articles. 2018 dedicated articles to types of solutions or solutions that can be used as a combined effort with less racist comments. The view has changed between years for individuals taking larger roles in the community. The increased police physical presence was sought to be the solution but provided to be a misstep in a long-term solution. More research is required in how labels have created problems for long-term solutions to chronic criminal behaviour.

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