“I HAVE NO ONE, I NEED SOMEONE”: CONTEXTUALIZING AMANDA TODD WITHIN THE “MY SECRETS” VIDEO GENRE

by

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Abstract

The 2012 suicide of BC teenager Amanda Todd captured Canadian and worldwide imaginations in part because of Amanda’s impassioned plea for help on YouTube a month prior to her suicide. My project contextualizes Amanda’s death within the genre of “My Secrets” YouTube confessional videos, as well as within and against larger neoliberal discourses about violence, especially violence facilitated by the Internet. I coded 162 My Secrets videos produced on YouTube between 2008 and 2013 and compared their contents to media accounts of youth suicides that took place during this time period in North American contexts. My subsequent analysis traces and critiques not only public conceptualizations of bullying, but also Western mainstream commitments to (cyber)bullying discourses that stem from a history of racist colonial violence and are used to justify ongoing systemic violence against, and surveillance of, marginalized peoples. Videos in this emergent genre demonstrate the enormous pressure under which young women who are experiencing violence are compelled to present a positive story, as well as the failure of neoliberal culture to deal with the realities of youth trauma. Ultimately, my study suggests that My Secrets videos contain simultaneously resistant and disciplinary possibilities.
CONTENT NOTE This project balances the reproduction and analysis of stories that are told in My Secrets videos, in the media, and on the Internet, with the dangers of reproducing objectifying discourses that reduce people to their suffering. I have not included explicit images of hatred or violence found on the Internet referring to Amanda Todd or to any other case. I centre the voices of the videographers who make My Secrets videos, and have included a series of screen shots of the cards they produced to tell their own stories. Whenever a screen shot is taken from my sample, I cross-reference this with the coding in Appendix C.

This thesis contains stories of rape, sexual violence, racism, homophobia, and misogyny, and engages with the discourses that (re)produce them.
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Chapter 1 Introduction: Contextualizing Amanda Todd

1.1 Introduction

In September 2012, BC teenager Amanda Todd posted an eight minute video to YouTube titled “My Story: Struggling, Bullying, Suicide, Self-harm” which has been viewed over 17,689,835 times\(^1\). Amanda ends her video with the phrase, “I have nobody, I need someone” [Figure 2]. In the black and white video, Amanda never speaks but uses flashcards to recount her experiences with sexual harassment, blackmail, image-based harassment, and bullying by friends and peers both in person and online (See Appendix A for transcript). In October 2012, one month after she posted her story, Amanda took her

\(^1\) This is based on the view count of her original post. There are multiple copies of her video on
own life. The harassment did not stop after her suicide, however; her family was tormented for months after her death with Facebook and other Internet hate pages dedicated to sexually shaming Amanda. Her story has been the subject of conferences, parliamentary debates, documentaries, public service announcements, and countless national and international news articles. In Canada, she has become a poster child for anti-bullying campaigns.

Amanda’s video has been taken as a unique expression of a young girl in pain. Canadian journalist Paula Todd writes:

> Why did Amanda’s case receive so much attention…? Because weeks [before her suicide], Amanda had issued a unique plea for help over the Internet…

Amanda’s video is far from unique, however. “There are literally thousands” of virtually identical videos on YouTube posted between 2008 and 2014. My conservative estimate is that there are approximately 100,000 to 150,000 My Secrets videos in English currently extant on YouTube. In my research, searching within my language limitations, I found examples in seven languages besides English, including French, Spanish, Portuguese, Polish, Swedish, German, and Hebrew. The videos are generally titled “My Secrets,” “If You Only Knew Me,” or simply “My Story.” More than a third of these videos in all

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4 My estimate comes from searching tags on Google and YouTube and is current as of Aug 2014.
languages are titled “My Secrets,” which was an early 2008 tag; thus, for the purposes of this thesis I will be using this title when referring to the genre. Like Amanda’s, these videos all feature silent narrators who use flashcards to tell of their experiences of trauma.

What is it, then, about Amanda’s particular story that it has mobilized such a sustained response for over two years? Her story is tragic, certainly, but so are many others that are forgotten by the next media cycle. Why Amanda and not somebody else? I argue that the main reason her story, rather than other similar stories and videos, has become a flashpoint for discussions around bullying is that Amanda’s narrative can be made to fit almost perfectly within certain mainstream discourses about bullying and violence on the Internet. Her story has been used to justify increased government surveillance, and to reinforce rather than challenge longstanding problematic discourses about young women’s sexuality and violence—particularly those discourses that locate dangerous strangers as the source of violence and put the responsibility for violence prevention in the hands of potential victims. These discourses ignore the dangers that are endemic within homes and communities and help to reproduce multiple inequalities along raced, classed, and gendered lines. Contextualizing Amanda’s story within the My Secrets genre, I argue, offers a powerful counter narrative to the simplistic “stranger danger” story and the policy recommendations that stem from it.

Amanda’s story contains contradictions. On the one hand, her story is universalized within bullying discourses. She stands in for every kid’s bad experiences with peers, and for every parent’s fear that they will lose a child. On the other hand, the sexualized elements of Amanda’s story are specific to her positionality as a teenage girl.
She showed her breasts, and she was shamed for it. She was harassed specifically for her gender and expressions of nascent sexuality, and this fact is simultaneously naturalized and erased. Online safety tips in the manual “The Door That’s Not Locked,” produced by the Canadian Centre For Child Protection, warn parents of the dangers of teen sexting, which they term self/peer exploitation. “Discuss with your adolescent,” it says, “the concept of dignity and self-respect and how it can be preserved or destroyed by messages/photos/video sent online.” The discourse employed focuses on girls “putting themselves at risk.” The site explains that if teens are sexual online, they should in fact


7 There is a learning handbook called The Respect Yourself activity booklet that “is designed to teach teens about the risks they face when sending pictures or videos by email, Instant Messaging (IM) or by posting them online.” (“Social Networking: How can I make it safer?” The Door that is not Locked: Teachers, accessed August 25, 2014, http://www.thedoorthatsnotlocked.ca/app/en/teacher/10-12/social_networking_how_to_make_it_safer.) The discourse of “protecting yourself” is tied in with that of “respecting yourself.” While it is supposed to be gender neutral and the handbook is for both boys and girls, the examples of respecting oneself include not dating older boys and knowing the difference between “good” and “bad” attention. They advise not showing your bra or being sexual “for attention.” The locus of intervention here is clearly the girl.
be prepared to be harassed by their peers. Safety tips designed to protect kids from “cyberbullies” rely on the same discourse as do blackmailers like those who tormented Amanda Todd: if this, then that. If there was no stigma attached to the sexual behavior of young women, there would have been nothing to use as blackmail. It is only because groups of teenagers routinely shame young women for their sexual behavior that blackmailers’ threats carry any currency.

Even materials designed prior to Amanda’s case to educate or empower teenagers regarding cyberbullying often offer two pieces of advice, the first being to abstain from sexual behavior and from making “poor decisions” online, and the second being to avoid strangers. Amanda’s story is distinctive among high-profile media accounts of cyberbullying because on the surface it contains both a notional dangerous stranger and sexual behavior online. Many other media reports of cyberbullying, including the cases of

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8 Parenting Tweens and Teens in a Digital World. Page 6 explains that following a self/peer exploitation incident, it is very likely the child will “be targeted by peers and subjected to verbal, and in some cases, physical bullying or harassment as well as alienation. In some instances, this can leave your child feeling isolated, shamed, helpless or humiliated. Treat self-harm seriously and immediately seek professional help.”

Rehteah Parsons\textsuperscript{10} and Audre Potts, involve groups of young men sexually assaulting young women, filming the sexual assault, and sharing the pictures on and offline. In the case of BC teenager Kimberle Proctor, the supposed “cyberbullying” was Kimberle’s murder by her ex-boyfriend. None of these cases involve strangers, so none could or would have been avoided by following Internet safety protocols, but this is routinely sidelined. As Wendy Chun\textsuperscript{11} points out, even Amanda was harassed (and in one case beaten) primarily by people that she knew, yet the media coverage of Amanda’s case positions the stranger as the source of the danger. Emily Bazelon writes, “It appears that the real victimizer was a creepy scary adult, not a teen bully, and that whatever happened in school was secondary to the damage that adult did.”\textsuperscript{12} This notional dangerous stranger, I argue, is what gives Amanda’s story much of its political currency.

\textsuperscript{10} Rehteah Parsons’ is a complicated case that has recently been prosecuted as child pornography. There was a publication ban on her name for several months. It is beyond the scope of this paper to theorize the implications of this.


In this era, “stranger danger” (always culturally defined) has moved firmly onto the Internet, and anonymous “cyberbullies” are what parents are told to fear. In her work theorizing strangers, Sara Ahmed argues that Western society projects its anxieties about violence and danger onto the figure of the stranger. As part of her analysis, she examines the discourses found in Neighbourhood Watch materials produced in the 1990s that advise parents to teach their children to avoid strangers lurking in their neighbourhood. In contrast, a 2013 newsletter from the Kingston Police Force tells parents to comb through their children’s social media accounts and to eliminate any strangers: “Of course you trust your child” it says, “but do you trust the millions of people who have access to him or her online?” The safety tips detailed in the newsletter focus not on the stranger in the park, but rather upon the stranger online.

Current fears about cyberbullies can be considered on the continuum of moral panics in North America that have surrounded young people’s access to public space.

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13 According to the PEW research group 82% of parents are concerned about their children interacting with strangers online and 53% are “very concerned.” Mary Madden, Amanda Lenhart, Sandra Cortesi, Urs Gasser, Maeve Duggan, Aaron Smith, and Meredith Beaton, “Teens, Social Media, and Privacy,” Pew Research Centers Internet American Life Project RSS, May 21, 2013, http://www.pewInternet.org/2013/05/21/teens-social-media-and-privacy/, 5.


According to danah boyd, public debate is dominated by fears for childhood safety.\textsuperscript{16} Parks have been sites of regulatory attention because unsupervised public spaces contain the possibility of both predatory strangers and youth sexual exploration. Public discourses around the Internet, she argues, are dominated by similar fears. Adults are concerned that unsupervised children online, especially girls, will both explore their own sexuality and be vulnerable to dangerous sexual advances by adults. She explains that the media serves to amplify these fears; for example, journalists have been writing since the mid 1990s about dangerous predatory strangers lurking on the Internet. With the advent of the social media webpage MySpace came renewed fears that young women would be vulnerable to sexual predation online. Television shows like \textit{To Catch a Predator}, a reality show that ran through the mid 2000s in which interviewers posed as teens on My Space and ambushed would-be pedophiles, help to maintain the exaggerated impression that the Internet is a haven for dangerous adults. Cyberbullies are the next iteration of this story. boyd argues that corporations and governments exploit public fears (already exaggerated by the media) around childhood safety to further their agendas by passing laws and selling products ostensibly aimed at protecting children. These laws and products often purport to protect children by limiting their participation in public space on and offline.

Corporately owned websites like Facebook and Google Plus have exploited fears about safety online to encourage the use of their products. Web 2.0,\textsuperscript{17} explains Wendy Chun,\textsuperscript{18} is characterized by corporately owned social media companies and corporately owned websites. This newer, supposedly “safer” Internet is sold as “a semi-private space of true names and true images” and as a place of “authenticity as authenticated by our friends.”\textsuperscript{19} Corporations sell the idea that the old Internet was dangerous because of anonymity, presenting the enforced use of real names as a solution to the danger of the Internet. She argues that two assumptions drive this view: first, that “accountability breeds responsibility” and thus real names breed better behavior, and second, that the worst danger comes from strangers, so limiting online communication to a small pool of family and acquaintances will keep us safe. There are multiple problems with this supposition. For example, it ignores the fact that people are most often attacked by those they know. As danah boyd says, “Facebook and face-to-face settings continue to be rife with meanness and cruelty.”\textsuperscript{20} Chun points out that sites like Facebook can actually put youth and marginalized groups more at risk for harassment because their personal information is more readily available and easily accessible to anyone who wants to hurt

\textsuperscript{17} The early Internet was characterized by static webpages produced by individuals and by anonymous communication. Web 2.0 is the name for the move from this older set-up to a system of dynamic user generated content and social media pages on corporately owned platforms.

\textsuperscript{18} Chun, “Habitual New Media.”

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.

them than it would be on an anonymous page. Requiring real names, boyd explains, strips Internet users of the power to decide what they share with whom. In face-to-face settings, individuals would have to ask for personal information like your name, place of employment, and telephone number—information that is often visible on Facebook (or, if invisible, easily hacked). Many people, boyd argues, face increased risk when they are forced to share their names. Vulnerable individuals such as rape survivors, people who are being stalked, sex workers, people fleeing abusive relationships or families, and people whose families or employers are unaware of their sexual orientation or gender identity often use pseudonyms online and would be put at risk if they shared their real names. Real name policies have also directly affected my research. In 2013, YouTube briefly instated a real name policy. After this policy came into effect, many of the My Secrets videos I had viewed and catalogued in 2012 were removed by the user or set to “private.” These videos contained content about family abuse and sexual assault by friends and acquaintances. It may be that these videographers no longer feel safe sharing their stories with their real names attached because their abusers, families, or potential employers could easily find their videos.

Like corporations, governments have also used the public’s fear of predatory strangers to further their agenda with often troubling implications. In the wake of several highly-publicized youth suicides, stories about cyberbullying have a particular cultural and political currency, enhanced both by the prevalence of social media and by the ubiquity of traditional media’s (including print, tv, radio, and news sites) reporting on the purported central role of social media in the deaths or assaults of young people. Stephen Harper has pledged to make cyberbullying a top priority and to “do whatever it takes to
stop cyber-bullying.”  

In 2013, Harper met with four families who had lost children due to cyberbullying-related suicides. He has since brought forward two proposed anti-cyberbullying bills, both of which contain strong surveillance measures that allow corporations to share, without a warrant, a variety of sensitive personal information about their customers’ internet usage with the government—which may be contrary to constitutional provisions for privacy. A similar UK bill now permits increased


22 Ibid. The four families were those of Amanda Todd, Rehteah Parsons, Kimberle Proctor, and Jenna Bowers-Branton.

23 Laura Payton, “Government Killing Online Surveillance Bill,” CBC News, February 11, 2013, http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/government-killing-online-surveillance-bill-1.1336384; “Internet Users’ Privacy Upheld by Canada’s Top Court,” CBC News, June 13, 2014 http://www.cbc.ca/m/touch/news/story/1.2673823. Bill C 30 “Protecting Children from Online Predators act” forced Internet providers and telecommunication companies to share information, including, but not limited to, names, addresses, and all Internet browsing history, with government without a warrant. It was canceled and replaced with Bill C 13. “Protecting Canadians from Online Crime Act.” This currently proposed act allows telecommunications companies to voluntarily share the same information This ruling calls into question the legality of Bill C-13. Both of these bills have been marketed as “Anti-cyberbullying bills.”

24 The Supreme Court of Canada ruled in June 2014 that voluntary sharing of information like this without a warrant is illegal and unconstitutional. CBC News, “Internet Users’ Privacy Upheld.”
surveillance on citizens. Cyberbullying discourse furthers agendas connected with expanding government and corporate powers, not merely those regarding children’s safety.

Amanda Todd’s story exemplifies the intertwined relationship between media, public fears, the government, and corporations. Of all the recent cases of youth suicide, even including the highly publicized 2013 death of Halifax teen Rehtaeh Parsons, Amanda’s case has garnered the most attention worldwide. Amanda’s name “was ranked third-highest as a trending name in 2012 [on Google and] eighth in Google’s list of overall trending search terms.” The online vigilante group Anonymous took it upon themselves to search for Amanda’s tormentors, though according to the RCMP they


ended up targeting the wrong person. Amanda has been the subject of several radio and television documentaries, multiple anti-bullying public service announcements, and hundreds of mainstream media articles. There have been anti-bullying conferences held in her honour, one of which paradoxically banned her family from attending. Her case has prompted parliamentary debates and calls for a special parliamentary commission on cyberbullying. Amanda’s family has met with the Prime Minister, and has been invited


to address parliament on proposed cyberbullying legislation. Her mother has toured the country multiple times, speaking at conferences, universities and schools.

In March 2014, an anti-bullying art show held in Penticton, BC showcased stills from Amanda’s video and also used them prominently in its advertising [Figure 3]. Amanda’s picture and an endorsement quote by her mother, Carol, is used to advertise ACCESS Youth Outreach Services Society, a Port Coquitlam organization that provides services for “at-risk, homeless and street involved youth.” The American-based YouTube series *Teens Respond* did a special episode on Amanda’s video. She has had a motion. The debate was about a motion from NDP backbencher “Motion M-385, [which called] for the creation of a special 12-member, all-party committee to develop a national bullying prevention strategy.” The motion was rejected after six weeks of debate.


rap song composed in her honour, titled “RIP Amanda Todd.” There is even a Legacy Foundation online where one can buy Amanda Todd merchandise, including legacy hoodies, bracelets, necklaces, decals, ball caps, a short story anthology called “Stories for Amanda,” and a musical anthology titled “Songs for Amanda.” Amanda Todd commemorative bracelets were also for sale at the Port Coquitlam Wal-Mart in 2013. Various celebrities have commented publically on Amanda’s story Some of these celebrities include: Madonna, who wrote Amanda’s name on her back at a concert; Perez Hilton; American musician Amanda Palmer; music producer Russell Simons; 


40 Amanda Palmer, “On Internet Hatred: Please Inquire Within,” The Official Website of Amanda Fucking Palmer, January 5, 2013, http://amandapalmer.net/blog/20130105/. Amanda Palmer responded to the story because she had released a similar video as a fundraiser for her new album a few weeks prior to Amanda Todd’s death.
and American Boxer Evander Holyfield, who, following his American bankruptcy, launched his Canadian line of BBQ sauces at a special Amanda Todd fundraising dinner and celebrity boxing match where Amanda’s mother Carol gave an anti-bullying talk.

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speech. A portion of the profits from his Canadian BBQ sauces will be donated to Amanda’s legacy fund. The Telus company held a “TELUS day of grieving” on May 31, 2014 in honour of Amanda Todd, and The Royal Winnipeg Ballet even choreographed a ballet in honor of Amanda.

Clearly, Amanda’s name carries particular social, political, and financial currency. She is, in essence, an international cyberbullying poster child. Her story is not just a story; rather, it has become a product to be marketed. In the midst of all this marketing and attention given to her story, one wonders what is being left out.

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47 Jackson, “Amanda Todd Legacy Fund.”


1.2 What is Being Left Out?

Looking at the various cases reported by traditional media and debated in Canadian parliament, it remains unclear what constitutes “cyberbullying” in contrast to other culturally-defined bullying and violence such as sexual harassment, sexual violence, gender policing, slut-shaming, or misogynist, racist, and homophobic violence. Nor is cyberbullying discourse deployed consistently. My research indicates that some cases, often those of young women from middle-class families, elicit the term cyberbullying while virtually identical cases of working-class people, especially working-class people of colour, do not. At this point I will consider the word “bullying” and associated narratives, including those of privilege.

At surface level, bullying discourse offers the appearance of neutrality. It refers to everything from cases of mild playground shoving, to cases of extreme harassment

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*50 See my Chapter 2 for more on this.*
including sexual, racial, and homophobic violence, implying that all of these different manifestations of violence are phenomena that can and do happen to any young person. However, media accounts of people of colour’s bullying stories are more likely to be doubted, or framed as “alleged.”

Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW), a prominent British Columbia-based rape-crisis organization, argues that the problem with the term “bullying” is that it “masks misogyny, sexism, racism, homophobia, and violent crimes like sexual assault.”

Late capitalism has brought with it a shift towards gender and race-neutral language and policies at multiple levels of government. The move to individualized, gender-neutral bullying programs ignores structural inequalities, and “renaming ‘sexual harassment’ as ‘bullying’ tends to psychopathologize gender violence while simultaneously stripping girl victims of powerful legal rights and remedies.”

Lee and Chatterjee point out that the discourse of bullying is a masculine


one, and that bullying is often seen as an ordinary rite of passage—something that makes people stronger. US President Barack Obama used the narrative that the experience of bullying makes people stronger in his homonormative “It Gets Better” video.\textsuperscript{55} Furthermore, Lee and Chatterjee argue that sexualized, racialized, and homophobic violence is not identical or equivalent to ordinary individual interpersonal conflict.\textsuperscript{57} Not only does conflating these different phenomena minimize experiences of violence and ignore the intersections of race, class, and gender, but using the discourse of bullying in cases of sexist and racist violence obfuscates the systemic nature of the violence, making it difficult to “see repeating patterns and systemic incidents such as the missing women in


\textsuperscript{55} It Gets Better is a genre of anti-bullying suicide prevention videos that was started in 2010 by popular sex advice columnist Dan Savage. In these videos, LGBTQ people who have survived homophobic harassment tell their stories of bullying and relate how their lives have subsequently improved, generally after high school. Multiple straight celebrity LGBTQ allies have made IGB videos and so have corporations including Disney, Telus, Visa and many others.

\textsuperscript{56} Barack Obama, President Obama: It Gets Better, YouTube video, 3:07, posted by “The White House,” October 21, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=geyAFbSDPVk. In his video he says: “You’ll look back on the struggles you’ve faced with compassion and wisdom. And that’s not just going to serve you, but it will help you get involved and make this country a better place.”

\textsuperscript{57} Lee and Chatterjee, “Amanda Todd, More than Bullying.”
the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, [and] the Highway of Tears where hundreds of women have been murdered or gone missing.”⁵⁸ Misnaming sexualized and racialized violence as “bullying” diverts public support and resources away from community anti-violence programs aimed at ending violence against racialized women and girls, and towards universalized, school-based anti-bullying programs which at best ignore the needs of marginalized people and at worst put them more at risk.

A report by West Coast LEAF⁵⁹ argues similarly that the term “cyberbullying” elides the fact that members of minority racial groups, LGBTQ people, people with disabilities, and women are disproportionately targets of online harassment. Adult women are just as likely as teens to experience harassment online. According to LEAF, much online harassment is misogynist violence. The report highlights five common manifestations of what is termed “cyber misogyny,” specifically: revenge pornography; non-consensual sharing of intimate images; child sexual exploitation; cyber stalking; and gender-based hate speech online.⁶⁰ Sharmila Joshi observes that Internet violence and harassment are extensions of pre-existing examples of violence against women, differing mainly in scale—since a picture can be shared with a larger audience online than in person—rather

⁵⁸ Ibid., 4
⁶⁰ Ibid., 5
than in kind. It is instructive to shift our focus away from questions surrounding what is new about violence facilitated by the Internet, and to consider instead what is repetitive, even obsessively so, in relation to pre-existing cultural patterns.

I return here to the “cyberbullying” and suicide of Amanda Todd. Amanda was targeted by a community of people known as web “cappers” who work together to create and share child pornography by gaining the trust of young women on live-streaming video blog platforms and getting them to perform increasingly sexual acts on camera. When Amanda stopped performing, some of the cappers attempted to


62 Amanda Todd committed suicide on October 10, 2012.


blackmail her into performing again. After she refused, they shared pictures of her breasts with all of her friends and family.\(^66\) She was subsequently shamed, harassed, tormented,

\(^{65}\) I use the word “some,” because it is not clear how many cappers were involved. Much of the media coverage is focused on finding the “individual” responsible for the blackmail. Most recently her case has been linked to a Dutch man named Aydin Cobin. (Patrick White, “On the Trail of Amanda Todd’s Alleged Tormentor,” *Globe and Mail*, May 31, 2013, http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/on-the-trail-of-amanda-todds-alleged-tormentor/article18935075/?page=all.) Earlier, her case was linked to a man named Kody Maxon, a man with multiple Canadian warrants out for his arrest for sexual crimes. (Cooper Fleishman, “Alleged Amanda Todd Cyberstalker Has a Warrant out for His Arrest,” *The Daily Dot* (blog), November 30, 2012, http://www.dailydot.com/news/kody-maxson-amanda-todd-warrant-issued/.) The RCMP said his name was linked to Amanda Todd’s case though the group Anonymous along with many other IP addresses and he was “a person of no interest.” Anonymous then linked the case with a man from Wisconsin (Tim Alamenciak and Petti Fong, “Amanda Todd: Online Group Anonymous Now Accuses U.S. Man of Tormenting Amanda Todd,” *Toronto Star*, October 17, 2012, http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2012/10/17/amanda_todd_online_group_anonymous_now_accuses_us_man_of_tormenting_amanda_todd.html.)

and physically assaulted by people she knew. Hate pages and memes\textsuperscript{67} spread across the Internet, directing gendered slurs toward her and telling her to kill herself.\textsuperscript{68} Further pages and images were still being created months after her death. According to the Amanda Todd Reporting Team—a group of mothers dedicated to reporting the existence of hate materials related to Amanda on Facebook with the goal of getting Facebook to remove these materials—they had one thousand images and twenty hate pages removed from Facebook in the first six days following Amanda’s death.\textsuperscript{69} I emphasize that her story contains elements of all five categories of cyber misogyny outlined by West Coast LEAF, yet her story is received and disseminated as a case of “cyberbullying”.

A few days after Amanda’s suicide, her aunt, Leana Todd, who lives in Truro, Nova Scotia, made a statement to the media that was only carried by her local newspaper,  

\textsuperscript{67} The word "meme" here refers to a manipulated image that spreads rapidly online. For example, pictures of Amanda were altered into fake advertisements for bleach, in reference to her first suicide attempt.

\textsuperscript{68} “While most of the images are gone, some still remain on the Twitter hashtag #ripamandatodd, and others are found on Google Images. There is no way to measure ongoing private consumption of saved or privately shared materials. Once again, it is important to emphasize the difficulties presented by the ephemeral nature of internet materials.

\textsuperscript{69} Joranne Pursaga, “Group Got Tip about Amanda Todd before Teen’s Suicide,” \textit{Toronto Sun}, 16 Oct. 2012, http://www.torontosun.com/2012/10/16/anti-bullying-group-got-tip-about-amanda-todd-before-teens-suicide. It’s interesting to note that this team is made up of mothers, not parents or communities. This ties into a long history of individual mothers, rather than communities, being primarily responsible for the safety of their children.
the Chronicle Herald. In this statement, Leana claims that what happened to Amanda is violence against women rather than bullying. According to Leana, Amanda was

…tortured and tormented and stalked. She was sexually lured and it's criminal behaviour …. From my point of view this is the new face of violence against young women. She was lured to flash, she made a choice and they used that against her and threatened her.\textsuperscript{70}

This narrative did not gain favour with the media, and a more “universal” bullying story continues to dominate media reports about Amanda’s case.

Lee and Chatterjee\textsuperscript{71} point out that Amanda’s biracial status as half Chinese and half European places her directly within a history of racialized sexual violence, Orientalist fetishization, and—because multi-racial women like Amanda are often mistaken for Indigenous—colonial violence against Indigenous women and girls. Yet the media coverage and resulting political mobilization around her case present a universalized cautionary tale. As one reporter puts it, Amanda is “pretty white girl tragedy entertainment.”\textsuperscript{72} Her whiteness is virtually universally assumed. Aside from


\textsuperscript{71} Lee and Chatterjee, “Amanda Todd, More than Bullying.”

derogatory remarks by racist bloggers,\textsuperscript{73} the only mention I could find of Amanda’s race was in a 2012 open letter by Lee and Chatterjee from “Antidote: Multiracial Indigenous Girls and Women’s Network,” in which the authors ask:

Why has a blanket of silence covered Amanda’s ethnic and racial background? Why is her death being reported as bullying and not gendered, sexualized and racialized violence?\textsuperscript{74}

Amanda’s case is not the only case framed as cyberbullying that has erased the race of the victim. The letter also names Kimberle Proctor—whose 2010 murder by her ex-boyfriend has been recently framed in the media and by the government as a case of cyberbullying—as also having mixed heritage. Kimberle’s mother, Lucia Proctor, is Latina (See Chapter Three for more on Kimberle).

The political focus on bullying in Amanda’s case is both striking and instructive because Amanda, unlike many cyberbullying suicide victims, gave a first-person account of her experiences on YouTube. By posting her video, she engages with the public. Had she followed the advice to never engage with strangers, her story would never have been told. Amanda’s story captured Canadian and worldwide imaginations in part because of this impassioned plea. Her video disclosure can be (and has successfully been) made to

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\textsuperscript{73} Multiple racist bloggers have commented on Amanda’s race. One example comes from a person with the pen name Instigator, who posted a picture of Carol Todd and said: “So thinking about having a mongrelized family? Think again.” Source: “Mongrelized Family of Girl Amanda Todd Who Committed Suicide,” Vancouver Forum, comment by Instigator, October 26, 2012, http://memebee.com/vancouver/viewtopic.php?t=40984&p=721561

\textsuperscript{74} Lee and Chatterjee, “Amanda Todd, More than Bullying,” 2.
fit the dominant discourses around bullying and victimhood in ways that mobilize people politically. Yet her disclosures—and those of other speakers/writers within the genre—resist simplifying discourses of cyberbullying and can illuminate ways in which bullying discourses mask systemic violence and disparities of power. Amanda’s facility with social media allowed her to frame her own story, and to do so in a way that elicited sympathy which many other youth suicides are not afforded. But this cannot be the whole story, and indeed Amanda’s story is not the whole story.

1.3 My Secrets

By September 2012, when Amanda Todd posted her video plea on YouTube, the My Secrets style of video was a firmly-established genre for young people, primarily women, to disclose their trauma. The videos in this genre all feature a silent narrator who tells a personal story with hand-written flashcards, set to music. “With note cards you’re saying so much without saying anything at all,” Molli Marshal, a bisexual girl who made a similar YouTube video after being beaten by classmates, explained to her local Boston news provider in December 2011. She added: “It symbolizes people not talking about such a big problem and people being afraid to talk.” Starting in 2008 with disjointed lists of positive and negative disclosures, card-based videos slowly evolved into an autobiographical genre with a typical narrative arc. [See Appendix B for timeline]. Early in January 2012, a blogger for Voice of America asked, “Why are there so many teens

spilling their secrets on YouTube?" In their April 2012 issue, *Seventeen* magazine published a feature article called “What’s Your Secret?” which discussed this “trending” new genre being used by young girls to relate experiences of sexual violence and trauma.77

My current research makes it clear that future work is needed to situate these videos in a more global context, but this work lies beyond the scope of this thesis. I think it is instructive to note, however, that Amanda was not the first case of suicide following a My Secrets video. In April 2012, six months before Amanda took her own life, Australian teenager Olivia Penepraze (VID-077 of my sample) was taken off life support a month after she became brain dead due to an attempted suicide. Only a few days before her suicide attempt, Olivia posted her second of two My Secrets videos.78 Her story was briefly mentioned in Australian news and barely made the news outside of Australia. This, at the very least, complicates the argument that Amanda’s story received worldwide attention because she committed suicide after posting a unique video to

76 Bernard, “‘The Note Card Confessional.’”
YouTube. Olivia’s story is virtually identical to Amanda’s, except that unlike Amanda she focused her narrative exclusively on people that were known to her.

In late 2011, a handful of young people, mostly young men, who made My Secrets videos were featured in multiple major media articles. Virtually all these articles, except for the two from April 2012 mentioned above, treat these videos as isolated cases of one or two videos at most. A writer from the Toronto Star noticed that Amanda Todd’s video was “eerily similar to one shot by [gay teen Jonah] Mowry almost a year earlier” but fails to bring in further contextualization. Days after Amanda’s suicide, a CBC news blog reported that according to her YouTube private message history, Amanda had been having ongoing conversations with a girl who called herself

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80 These young people were, in order of newspaper appearance: Jade Waynesco VID-122 (Jan 2011); Kaitlin Brand VID-008 (Nov 2011); Jonah Mowry VID-051 (Nov 2011); Emmanuel Peron, not in my sample as his video was removed (Dec 2011); and Ben Breedlove, VID-034 (Dec 2011).

81 This seems to be due to a renewed media interest in bullying and suicide narratives posted to YouTube after two boys, Jaime Hubley and Jayme Rodemyer, killed themselves in fall 2011 after posting “It Gets Better” videos to YouTube.

MollyDoyle18 who had made a similar video in January 2012, this article also did not present a broader picture. Media coverage regarding Amanda’s case does not ask, or does not want to ask, where Amanda got the idea to make her video. To date, there has been very little academic work or media coverage regarding these videos. The only academic reference I found was in a 2013 conference presentation by Wendy Chun which touches on Amanda Todd and the My Secrets videos that were inspired by hers, which Chun theorizes are an example of a repetitive cultural pattern; Chun does not mention, however, that Amanda was in conversation with a pre-existent genre. In fact, she credits Amanda as the inventor of this genre.

The majority of the My Secret videos tell of multiple issues, including but not limited to family abuse, sexual assault, domestic violence, stalking, partner violence, struggles with self-harm, suicide attempts, peer harassment, image-based harassment, and difficulties finding help. The narrators who relate experiences of being harassed often explain that they were or are being attacked by peers because of poverty, because they live in a trailer or a foster home, because peers found out about family violence in their homes, or because of their race or their supposed sexual orientation. Some report being shamed because of a loss of a parent to divorce or death. Like Amanda’s videos, many include stories of girls experiencing harassment after having sex with the wrong person,


84 Chun, “Habitual New Media.”
or being shamed for supposed sexual choices or after a sexual assault. They tell of the dangers they have faced from people that they knew. “No one knew what was happening in my home,” says Zoe Royer [Figure 4], telling viewers of abuse by her father who later murdered her mother in a public murder/suicide. Numerous other girls echo this sentiment: danger is in their homes, their schools and their neighbourhoods. Strangers are not the focus of this genre; rather, I argue, the genre offers a pushing back against the notion of stranger danger. Any single given video may not offer a systemic analysis (although some do), but together they comprise a powerful archive, the sheer volume of which bears witness to systemic violence and material circumstances. These videos are full of paradoxes: the Internet as a site both of danger and harassment and of protection from danger and harassment. In them are contradictory tensions around silence and voice; resistance and discipline; connection and distance; optimism and death. The My Secrets genre offers a unique window through first person accounts into the violence some young people face. These videos reveal both the failure of neoliberal\textsuperscript{85} culture to deal with trauma and the ways in which it (re)produces cultures of violence. They also demonstrate how youth respond to and resist dominant narratives, try to create community, and make their voices heard. Viewed within the context of other young people’s video disclosures, Amanda’s story looks rather different than when taken in isolation as a cautionary tale.

\textsuperscript{85} Neoliberalism is a governing philosophy that reframes citizens as clients of the government whose worth is measured by their success in the market. Failures or successes, of individuals or government policies, are measured entirely by capitalist metrics.
1.4 Methodology

My thesis contextualizes the story of Amanda within the YouTube video genre with which she was in conversation, and against larger individualizing discourses about violence—particularly violence facilitated by the Internet. I coded the video disclosures from a semi-random selection of 162 My Secrets videos posted on YouTube between 2008 and 2014 that I gathered between February and May 2014 (see pages 37-41 for fuller explanation). For ease of reference I have numbered each of my videos in the order in which I coded them, beginning with VID-001, and I have included my coding in Appendix C. I have numbered Amanda’s video as VID-000 because she is central to my work but outside of my coded sample.

After grounding my work in feminist, anti-racist, and social media studies, I began my targeted My Secrets online research in October 2012, focusing on Amanda and collecting articles and screen shots of various hate pages. I searched media articles for
similar cases and checked to see if there had been any other suicides following YouTube video disclosures. I put in place a Google notification to alert me if any new articles containing Amanda’s name were published. In mid-October, 2012, the Amanda Todd Reporting Team posted a link on their Facebook page to a YouTube video titled “Kaelyn and My Secrets” which was originally posted to YouTube on March 20, 2012. This was the first My Secrets Video I had seen other than Amanda’s, leading eventually to my previously-mentioned language-limited and project-delimited estimates about the genre.

The textual and visual richness of these videos and their autobiographical nature lend My Secrets particularly well to case studies. While I do refer to individual cases, I also make use of content analysis: “an approach to the analysis of documents and texts (which may be printed or visual) that seeks to quantify content in terms of predetermined categories and in a systematic and replicable manner.”86 This allows me to make quantitative claims about the frequency with which particular content occurs in a way that case studies alone could not.

My methodological framework is grounded in feminist content analysis, popular culture studies, post-colonial theory, and affect theory. In her paper “The Feminist Practice of Content Analysis,” Patricia Leavy gives an overview of content analysis, which she defines as “the systematic study of texts and other cultural products or

nonliving data forms.” She explores its usefulness in both qualitative and quantitative research across media—textual, visual and audiovisual—from coding the number of times particular words are found in a text to rich thematic analysis. This approach to research, explains Leavy, comes out of the intermingling of poststructural and feminist world views and seeks to locate not only which cultural and discursive forms are present in particular texts but also the conspicuous absences, silences, and erasures.

Shulamit Reinharz claims feminist scholars do not simply look at the content but are likely to see meaning as mediated, and therefore to examine both the text and the processes of its production. They are also likely to examine the processes that prevent texts from being produced. In my work on the mediations of meaning, I examine not only the content of individual videos, but also social forces that might encourage or discourage different people from making My Secrets videos and that help determine which narrators are listened to and which are ignored.

1.4.1 Previous use of Content Analysis on YouTube Generated Content

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The challenges posed by YouTube as a user-generated visual medium (albeit one with corporate and regulatory aspects)—such as finding and naming categories of video to study, deciding on coding categories, and separating verbal and non-verbal communication (Molyneaux, et. al)—has lead many researchers to focus on analyzing the comments generated in response to videos rather than the videos themselves.\textsuperscript{89} Content analysis of YouTube comments has been previously used to examine racist and victim-blaming discourses surrounding women leaving abusive relationships.\textsuperscript{90} There has also been some content analysis of visual material on YouTube. Molyneaux, O’Donnell, Gibson, and Singer\textsuperscript{91} compared the content and technical quality of YouTube video blogs by gender, while Weaver, Zelenkauskaite and Samson\textsuperscript{92} used quantitative content analysis to compare violent content on YouTube with research about violent content in film and television shows. My work builds on previous coding work done on YouTube content and I have found that coding the My Secrets video genre presents fewer complications to coding than does other visual content found on YouTube. Firstly, the

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content of the videos is text-based, without verbal inflections or mannerisms. Technical problems of transcribing are largely eliminated, though unclear writing led to elimination of some materials. Conventions of genre assist in organizing materials. All videos that used note cards set to music to tell a personal narrative were included as a possible sample in the My Secrets genre, with some exclusion of obviously hostile parodies. There are a number of hostile parodies on YouTube by men who initially follow the genre conventions to claim they either sexually assaulted or murdered their partner, only to reveal this as a joke at the end. For example, a man made a video whose cards read: “I have a secret. I had a girlfriend, and I killed her, with this big ass…dick.” He then proceeds to shake his crotch at the screen while laughing.

1.4.2 Coding

I decided to use semi-random cluster samples. I began this process in February 2014. As my entry point, I began with two URLs I had previously located in 2012 that were still active. I followed the suggested links on the right hand side of the page, copying and pasting the URLs into a document without watching the videos. I did this until I hit a dead end and began to get repeats in the videos. This was after locating two groups of twenty videos each clustered around my two entry videos. I went through the titles of these videos in my initial group of forty looking for common titles. I searched for variations in each of the following titles: “My Secrets”; “If You Only Knew Me”; “You Know My Name but not My Story”; “Tumblr Secrets”; and “Notecard Confessions.”

order to get a mixture of popular and less popular videos, I would pick an entry video that was several pages into the search and take my cluster sample from there. I chose to take a cluster sample rather than just choosing the videos because I did not want to let my preconceptions about the videos influence my results.

In early 2012, Google changed its algorithm for suggesting videos. Prior to March 2012, these suggestions were made based simply on the number of people who clicked on the video. After 2012, suggestions were based on how long the person who clicked on the video watched the video. Only videos that were frequently watched at least to the halfway mark were recommended. So my initial group of videos were all popular videos that had both high click counts and high view counts. What I found interesting is that there was a much higher representation of diverse bodies, ages, and ethnicities in Secrets videos that were posted before 2012, prior to the algorithm change.

I found that there was particular content that reoccurred frequently. This content included references to: bullying; contact with psychiatric professionals or institutions; loss of loved ones through death from accidents, disease, suicide, or murder as well as loss of loved ones through divorce, being placed in foster care, or relocation; violence including domestic abuse, child abuse, and intimate partner violence; sexual assault;

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including molestation as children, and rape and sexual assault as teenagers; and self-harm.

During this process I noticed three main recurring themes. I termed these themes: “The False Happiness Motif,” “The Positive Turn,” and “Reaching out to the Audience.” The False Happiness motif refers to disclosures that begin with phrases such as “I look happy but I’m not”; “I’m always smiling but the smile just hides how unhappy I am”; and “I try to look happy.” The Positive Turn refers to a change in narrative tone that happens in the last third of the video. The videos generally begin by disclosing negative experiences that happened to the narrator, and follow a particular narrative arc: they were harassed, assaulted, or attacked, they began to self-harm, they felt completely alone, they sought help but things did not improve. Around the two-thirds mark, there is a sudden turn toward positivity in which the narrator tells the audience that things are better now. Some Positive Turns simply tell the audience that the narrator is strong and will not be brought down or defined by their negative experiences. Others give specific positive changes: they are no longer cutting; they have changed schools or, if they dropped out, they have returned to school; they have a new relationship; or they are in therapy. The Positive Turn always tells the audience that things are improving or will improve. The phase of Reaching Out to the Audience generally occurs after the Positive Turn. In this phase of the video, the narrators address the audience directly, sending a message that viewers who are also struggling are not alone. Sometimes they also offer specific advice to viewers such as telling them to phone a support line, see a therapist, go to the police, or seek help from friends or family. These instances I coded under “Other of Note” as “Direct Calls to Action.” In other videos, the narrators are skeptical of any help offered
by institutions, and Reaching Out to the Audience in these cases includes the narrator personally offering to help the viewer. Generally, these narrators will give an email address and ask the viewers to contact them anytime for help.

It is worth noting that while every video, except for two very early examples of the genre, contains at least one of the content categories, not every video contains all of these themes. One-third of my sample videos include the False Happiness motif, 44% of them contain the Positive Turn, and half include Reaching Out to the Audience. However, even in videos without a Positive Turn, the narrators recount all the ways they have attempted to improve their life or get help. In Amanda’s video, Amanda mentions that things were getting better for her and she only became depressed again after renewed harassment. She also mentions that she is on anti-depressants and in counseling. Half of the videos reach out to the audience explicitly within their video. Virtually all the videos, including Amanda’s, have a note in their video description explicitly telling the viewer things will improve for them. Amanda’s video description includes the following:

I hope I can show you guys that everyone has a story, and everyone’s future will be bright one day, you just gotta pull through. I’m still here aren’t I? [Figure 7]

Along with the recurrent narrative motifs listed above, I have included in Appendix C a condensed version of the coding in a chart that includes the coding categories and a short synopsis of each video.

After finding and coding videos, I did extensive online archival research in an attempt to trace the origins of the My Secrets genre. I have found evidence that this genre began as a fan-based video extension of the crowd-sourced online art project PostSecret that began in 2004. My findings are beyond the scope of this paper, and I will explore
this in future work. However, I have included a timeline in Appendix B for any interested reader who would like additional information about the origins of My Secrets.

1.4.3 Demographics of my Sample

I coded one 162 videos by 158 videographers. Four videographers’ follow-up videos are in my sample, three by white women and one by a woman of colour. I kept these in my sample to be able to do a longitudinal analysis of disclosures. The breakdown of my sample is found in the chart below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Gender-Queer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People Of Colour</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Age:

The average age of the people posting videos is 16.5 and the mode\textsuperscript{96} is 15. There are significantly more adults in my sample of people of colour than in my white sample.

Gender:

I may have an over-representation of men in my sample: 15 out of 158 (or 9%) are men. Because there were so few men in this genre, I differentially chose to click on men as entry point videos for cluster samples. Twenty-four additional examples by men were excluded from my sample because they were parodies; some were simply mocking the genre and some contained malicious jokes about violence against women or

\textsuperscript{96} The mode is a statistical term which means the number that occurs most frequently.
murdering women. I defined the videographers’ gender based on their gender self-identification. One of the people in my sample does not give a gender; one of their secrets is that “people always mistake [their] gender,” and in subsequent videos on their channel they refer to themself as genderqueer, and so I have placed them in a separate gender category. Rather than treat the men as a separate sample, I have decided to include them in my larger sample; however, the reader should be aware that there may be more men included in this work than is representative for the genre at large, and also that many contributors may have felt pressured to conform to standardized gender categorizations.

Race:

Just over a quarter of my sample are self-identified people of colour: 26% or 41 out of 158 videographers. Two of the women of colour in my sample are mothers. Five are men, four of whom identified themselves as gay or bisexual.

Sexual Orientation:

Eleven videographers specified in their videos that they were not heterosexual. Seven of these were male, and four were female. Five identified as bisexual, five as gay, and one as pansexual.97 Several additional videographers disclosed that they were gay in contexts outside of the My Secrets video, either on their YouTube channel descriptions or in the media.

Class:

97 Pansexual is a term used in lieu of bisexual to describe people who are attracted to multiple genders. This term reflect the theory that sex, gender and sexuality are all on a spectrum rather than fixed binaries.
Judging from contextual cues in the videos, the majority of the narrators are from middle- or lower-middle-class backgrounds. Thirty-one videographers made explicit references to being from lower-class backgrounds. Of these, eleven disclosed poverty, four had been homeless, and seven dropped out of high school. Nine disclosed being fostered, adopted as an older child, or otherwise taken into protective child custody as minors.

Disability:

Two people in my sample were physically disabled, and three had life threatening medical conditions.

Contact with psychiatric professionals:

Forty-one narrators have one or more psychiatric diagnoses, twenty-one of whom are currently on medication for their psychiatric conditions. Thirteen narrators have been institutionalized over suicide attempts. Twenty-two narrators are currently in therapy.

1.5 Discussion

My coding reveals three important issues. The first is that violence—whether sexual violence, family abuse, domestic violence, or intimate partner violence—is a major problem for most of the young women, and the few young men, making these videos, and that bullying in these cases is best understood as an extension of the violence, misogyny, or inequality they already face. Within my sample, there are forty-four videos that disclosed domestic, family, and intimate partner violence, and fifty that disclosed sexual violence. There were also three murders disclosed in these videos: two young women lost their mothers to abusers and one woman lost her cousin. Half of my sample
experienced bullying, with the most common type being gendered harassment— in some cases gendered harassment following sexual assault. If bullying is understood to be violence, then 80% of my sample experienced violence. In the My Secrets stories, it is virtually impossible to separate out bullying as an isolated problem separate from and exclusive of violence, misogyny, classism, homophobia, or racism.

The second issue that my coding of these videos reveals is that danger from a stranger, especially online, is a vanishingly small problem for these videographers. Two people in my sample, both women of colour, were raped by strangers—one in a parking lot and one by a British tourist in the Middle East. Only a single video out of a total 162 videos featured a dangerous stranger online, and even in this case, the stranger may have been someone connected to the girl’s family. The third thing my coding revealed is that despite these experiences of trauma and violence, the videographers making contributions to the My Secrets genre show strength and resilience: half of the videographers in my sample explicitly reach out to community and tell viewers that they are not alone.

1.6 Theoretical and Methodological Framework

The three main theorists I work with are Sara Ahmed, Michel Foucault and Angela McRobbie. Ahmed’s work on “stranger danger” is integral to my research. Ahmed questions the ongoing philosophical commitment to the concept of “the stranger” as a figure that is both fetishized and imagined to have a real world correlate: someone

\[98\text{ Fetishism is understood here as the process of transforming an idea into an object that is divorced from the social and material history that brought it about and that conceals that history.}

“Stranger fetishism is a fetishism of figures: it invests the figure of the stranger with a life of its
who really exists somewhere out there rather than simply a collective fiction. A crucial question for Ahmed is what is erased and elided behind this construction. According to Ahmed the figure of the stranger, created through colonial anxieties, is deployed in xenophobic ways to police the boundaries of neighbourhoods and nations. Not everyone that is unfamiliar is a “stranger”; instead, only those people who are already raced and classed as not belonging to a particular space qualify as the stranger. “The projection of danger onto the figure of the stranger” Ahmed argues, “allows violence to be figured as exceptional and extraordinary – as coming from outside of the protective walls of the home, family or nation.”99 This projection of the abject onto the stranger allows for the construction of binaries that figure “home” as safe and public space as a potential site of danger policed by heroic white male subjects who protect the vulnerable bodies of women and children, and the dangerous “Other” they must be protected against. Ahmed explains:

The stranger then is not simply the one whom we have not yet faced. The stranger comes to be faced as a form of recognition: we recognize somebody as the stranger, rather than simply failing to recognize them.100

Viewed in this way, the focus on eliminating unseen anonymous strangers online and limiting online interactions to social networks in pre-existing social circles on Facebook is an acknowledgement that one has to see the person in advance to be able to tell own insofar as it cuts ‘the stranger’ off from the histories of its determination.” Ahmed, Strange Encounters, 5.

99 Ibid., 36.

100 Ibid., 21.
stranger from neighbour. The discourse of stranger danger, according to Ahmed, is “a refusal to recognize how violence is structured by, and legitimated through, the formation of home and community as such.”¹⁰¹

This idea of the stranger plays out in the discourse of bullying in a number of ways. In cyberbullying discourse, the danger is generally narrativized as coming from the stranger, and this process in turn creates the story of the child in need of protection. There is an extensive body of literature that points out that the culturally imagined child in need of protection is white, and that children of colour are not afforded the same discursive innocence. Thus, it seems that the in discourse of bullying, the child that needs to be protected is, like the stranger, already raced and classed.

The innocence of the child comes to embody…all that could be stolen or lost by the proximity of strangers. The child’s innocence and purity becomes a matter of social and national responsibility: through figuring the stranger as too close to the child, the stranger becomes recognizable as an attack on the moral purity of nation space itself. It is over the bodies of children that the moral campaign against strangers is waged. ¹⁰²

I see this discourse of moral purity playing out in the name the conservative government gave to their 2011 proposed anti-cyberbullying bill: “Bill C-30: Protecting Children from Internet Predators Act.” Discourses around the dangerous stranger on the Internet focus on kids being protected or “protecting themselves,” thus foreclosing on the possibility that this protected class might be the source of violence or that protection in the face of systemic power inequities is often impossible. Advice directed at young people warns

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 36. Emphasis in original.

¹⁰² Ibid., 35.
them against showing their breasts, rather than admonishing them to refrain from raping people and putting pictures of the assault on the Internet. Matters become more complicated when the rapists are from the same protected class, the same family, the same area, as the victim.

If violence is always supposed to originate from outside the protective walls of one’s own space, how then do we understand violence found within said space? Too often the problem is framed as a psychological issue belonging to the victim of bullying or gendered violence rather than an endemic cultural systemic issue, and so the bullied child, like the battered woman, is offered psychological rather than material help. The evidence-based psychological and social work literature around bullying interventions focuses on the personality traits, personal characteristics, and habits of bullied youth. In “Identifying Children Potentially at Risk for Serious Maladjustment due to Peer Victimization,” Newgent et al. focus on identifying individual children who may be at risk for depression, suicide, or acting out due to bullying, and then offering these victimized children therapy. There is no mention of offering these children protection

103 A parallel to which I shall return in Chapter 3.
105 Ibid.
of any kind from victimization, other than individual psychological counseling. A newspaper article about the suicide of Jamey Rodemeyer, a fourteen-year-old gay boy, reports, “Jamey was seeing a social worker and a therapist. But that didn’t stop the bullying.”¹⁰⁶ Nor can it. In her video, Amanda Todd tells of seeing therapists in order to get help, as so do fifty-five other My Secrets narrators in my sample. In the entire sample of 162 videos, 22 videographers stated that they had been in therapy, 21 were or had been on psychiatric medication such as anti-depressants, 41 had one or more diagnoses, and 13 were institutionalized for mental health issues (with some overlap among these categories). Most experienced both violence and harassment. In VID-094, the narrator was being tormented, physically attacked, threatened, told to kill herself, and called gendered slurs. She writes that she “went to a counselor” and ended up talking about the bullying, adding, “it helped but I STILL got bullied!” After she moved schools, her experience of harassment got worse. The link between therapy for the victim and ending bullying is an often unquestioned but deeply flawed one.

Ahmed’s work in The Promise of Happiness lends an important perspective on how assumptions about talking cures work. Happiness, according to discourses mapped by Ahmed, is to be found in the “good” relationship, home, or nation. Anyone who points

out problems within these “good” relationships or spaces—be it the unhappy queer, killjoy feminist, or migrant—and I here extend this analysis to the raped or harassed girl, the homophobically attacked boy—becomes the source of the problem. The promise of happiness offered by psychological interventions is that “to feel better is to be better.”

Disjunctive happiness discourses characterize the My Secrets genre, as exemplified by The False Happiness Motif, characterized by the videographer saying something like, “I try so hard to look happy but I’m not….,” and The Positive Turn, in which the videographer tells the viewer that while they have gone through violence, they are starting to feel better and so things “will get better,” they “promise.”

The pressure of mandatory happiness functions here as what Angela McRobbie calls a “disarticulation practice,” which is a discursive mode of addressing or thinking about a problem—encouraged by increasingly corporatized individualizing government policies and practices—that makes identifying and discussing systemic problems of inequality and thus creating potential solidarity across difference difficult or impossible. If the goals of the civil rights movement have already been achieved, as neoliberal governments claim, then the remaining discursive possibility—one that disenfranchised populations are often trained to accept and rearticulate—is one of individual failure.


108 Seventeen videos include the specific phrase “It will get better, I promise.” Sixty-six videos in total use the phrase “It will get better.”

Poststructural philosopher Michel Foucault’s work emphasizes a shift from “sovereign power” to what Foucault terms “bio-power.”¹¹⁰ “Bio-power” has two arms, the first being disciplinary power, which is a type of power that regulates the behavior of individual, and the second being governmentality, which comprises the practices that make governing large populations possible. Disciplinary power, as Foucault explains in his lectures on Psychiatric Power at the College de France, “fabricates subjected bodies”¹¹¹ and pins power onto individual bodies. Through disciplinary power, people become individuals who are graded and monitored, and who learn to internalize habits of thought and behavior. Individuals thus become sites of microscopic surveillance, while power on the other hand becomes hierarchized and diffuse. Near the end of the introduction to his History of Sexuality, Foucault claims that the shift from sovereign power to bio-power was a shift from power over death to power over life; this new power was to “invest life through and through.”¹¹² Disciplinary power seeks the individuals that are responsible for particular actions and asks them to give an account of those actions. Amanda’s story manifests bio-power in the process whereby the police, government, and media search for the “individual” responsible for her blackmail rather than the group of people responsible for it or those implicated in failures to respond during her lifetime.


¹¹² Ibid., 139
The sort of governmentality with which Foucault was most concerned in his later lectures was neoliberalism, a form of governmentality that measures social programs and social goods entirely by their success in the free market.\footnote{Michel Foucault, \textit{The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France 1978-79}, ed. Michael Snellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2008), 133.} Elizabeth Povinelli explains that neoliberal governments

stopped assessing social programs and actions on the basis of political philosophy and instead restricted themselves to issues of profit and loss and the languages of efficiency, productivity and benefit to gross domestic profit.\footnote{Elizabeth A. Povinelli, \textit{Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism} (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 21-22.}

Tracing the way that disciplinary power functions through neoliberal cyberbullying discourse and the ways in which individual people tell their My Secrets stories opens up possibilities for questioning and rupturing those dominant discourses and seeing what other ways of thinking through this problem emerge when we centre the voices of the youth in this video genre.

Sara Mills’ book \textit{Discourse: The New Critical Idiom} explores the ways in which the word “discourse” has multiple, sometimes contradictory definitions that span across multiple academic disciplines including critical theory, sociology, linguistics, philosophy, and social psychology.\footnote{Sara Mills, \textit{Discourse} (New York: Routledge, 1997), 1.} Brian David Hodges, Ayelet Kuper, and Scott Reeves define discourse analysis as the study of “uses of language,” explaining that

\footnotetext[115]{Sara Mills, \textit{Discourse} (New York: Routledge, 1997), 1.}
critical discourse analysis involves not
only the examination of text and the social uses of
language but also the study of the ways in which the very
existence of specific institutions and of roles for individuals
to play are made possible by ways of thinking and
speaking.\textsuperscript{116}

While many other theorists take up the notion of discourse in a multiplicity of ways,

Foucault’s conceptualization as explained by Mills—that “discourse” defines statements
and/or text which alone or in combination are “truth”-producing—is most useful to me.

Mills explains that for Foucault, discourses are not just written or spoken artifacts, but are
in fact clusters of relationships that simultaneously produce the object being spoken
about. Discourses are productive and can be discovered by following that which is
produced. Mills argues that while Foucault is not feminist in his approach, this approach
lends itself well to feminist work, particularly work around confessional discourse,
discourses of femininity and heterosexuality, and how dominant and resistant discourses
work in conflict with each other. The confessional nature of the YouTube videos under
research in this study lends itself extremely well to this lens.

\textsuperscript{116} Brian David Hodges, Avelet Kuper and Scott Reeves, “Qualitative Research: Discourse
Chapter 2 When it Doesn’t Get Better: Disclosures of Bullying and Harassment in My Secrets

2.1 My Secrets as an Anti-Bullying Genre?

As explained in the previous chapter, Amanda Todd’s YouTube video is often viewed primarily as a story about bullying. Likewise, the My Secrets video genre could be read as a series of anti-bullying texts similar in character to the It Gets Better video series. The “It Gets Better Project” was launched in 2010 by US sex advice columnist Dan Savage in response to a series of teen suicides by white, teenage boys who were homophobically bullied. The project began as a single video, in which Dan and his husband Terry Miller discuss their experiences of bullying and how much things have improved for them as adults. From that initial video, the project ballooned into more than 50,000 videos—including examples from corporations and straight public figures—and a New York Times best-selling book, all of which promise a better tomorrow for LGBTQ teens.

There are indeed similarities between the two genres. Both offer first person accounts posted to YouTube, and both follow a similar narrative trajectory about an individual process of overcoming hardships. Clearly, the It Gets Better genre has influenced My Secrets; after 2010, many of the videos in the My Secrets genre began incorporating the statement “it gets better” into their narratives. However, there are some significant differences. It Gets Better videos are primarily, although not exclusively, produced by adults, whereas My Secrets videos are primarily made by teens. The
narrators of It Gets Better videos are generally coming from successful middle-class backgrounds, and their stories of survival are in the past. The narrators of My Secrets videos come from a variety of class, race, and sexual orientation backgrounds, and the majority of them are struggling in the present. The most significant difference between the two genres is the corporate success of It Gets Better. There have been corporately produced “It Gets Better” videos interviewing employees from hundreds of companies including Telus, Disney/Pixar, Nokia, Google, Yahoo, and Microsoft.117 Multiple public figures, from Hillary Clinton to Ellen DeGeneres, have contributed stories to the project. Bullying, as presented in It Gets Better, is both a natural and time limited experience. Once teens graduate, their success and freedom from violence and harassment is not just assumed, but guaranteed by the narrators. No interventions other than patience are necessary. Malinda Smith argues that institutions love good news stories, particularly ones that incorporate their institution into that positive story.118 It Gets Better videos fit neatly into this narrative frame. In contrast, My Secrets videos are more complicated and messy.

Of my sample, 50% report experiences which they refer to as bullying. Many of these also report sexual violence, loss of loved ones, self-harm, and abuse. Because of the ways that race, class, gender, and violence intersect, it is difficult to separate bullying


118 Malinda Smith, “Gender, Whiteness, and ‘Other Others’ in the Academy,” in States of Race, ed. Sherene Razack, Malinda Smith, and Sunera Thobani (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2010), 42.
from other forms of violence, as this data will reveal. This chapter primarily uses the data from the 82 out of my sample of 162 videos which include experiences of bullying. I have chosen to report these experiences using the language the narrators use to describe what happened to them. My findings are consistent with WAVA W’s claim that the word “bullying” is often used to cover up racist, sexist, and homophobic violence. These narratives deviate from popular scripts around bullying which position it as an experience separate from other forms of violence and oppression and which consider cyberbullying as distinct from other forms of peer harassment.

Of the eighty-two of the videographers who disclosed bullying, seventy-six were female and six were male. Seventeen of the people who disclosed bullying were people of colour, of whom fifteen were female and two were male. Eight disclosed experiences of racist or anti-Semitic bullying. Thirty-six of the videographers, all female, disclosed being subjected to gendered slurs such as “slut,” “whore,” and “attention whore.” Eleven disclosed homophobic bullying, of whom five were male and six were female. Five out of the latter six were also recipients of gendered slurs. There were eight cases of cyberbullying by groups of people known to the victim (all of these videographers were also being tormented in person), and one girl was targeted and exploited by a pedophile online (but does not refer to this as “bullying”).
I begin this chapter by focusing on each type of bullying by category. I compare these narratives from the My Secrets videos with those from highly publicized cyberbullying cases and examine similarities between the cases. Cyberbullying is often portrayed in media accounts as a new form of behavior distinct from other types of harassment. My data demonstrates that there are more similarities than differences between the publicized cases of cyberbullying and the everyday experiences of harassment which the youth in my sample experience. I conclude this chapter by revisiting It Gets Better in light of these My Secrets video disclosures and question the utility of neoliberal anti-bullying interventions that do not include an intersectional analysis. I argue that this data demonstrates that bullying is best understood as an extension of other kinds of raced, classed, gendered, and homophobic violence. It is important to note that while I deal with each of these categories separately at the
beginning of this chapter for the purposes of analysis, that race, gender, class, and sexual orientation are not separate but rather interlocking categories.

Likewise bullying and other forms of violence are interrelated. Take, for example, the story of Zoe Royer in VID-019 [Figure 6]. Zoe’s parents were separated because of domestic violence but her father lured her, her mother, and her sister to meet at a local MacDonald’s (despite a restraining order in place against him) by pretending he had cancer with only weeks to live. When the family arrived at the meeting spot, the father shot the mother and then himself in a murder/suicide. A great deal of media coverage was devoted to the case in Zoe’s home state of Colorado, and because of this she began to be bullied as “an attention whore.” The harassment in her hometown got to be so intense that she dropped out of school and she and her sister moved out of state. The harassment continues via YouTube video comments: many commentators doubt her story, although it is easily corroborated by Google searches,¹¹⁹ and call her a liar, a “slut,” and an “attention whore.” Despite discourses of exceptionalism, the McDonald’s “horror” story is not extraordinary. According to the American Psychological Association, “more than three women are murdered by their husbands or boyfriends each day.”¹²⁰ Where does the


experience of violence end and the bullying begin in this story? They are clearly interrelated phenomena.

I begin my analysis of My Secrets disclosures by considering experiences of gendered harassment as an expression of class boundary policing. I then move into an analysis of race that takes into account both class and gender, and finally finish with an examination of homophobic harassment that includes an examination of how gender, class, race, and sexual orientation shape experiences of homophobic harassment. Kimberle Crenshaw argues that feminist and anti-racist scholars often treat race and gender as separate, sometimes opposing issues, with the consequence that neither group articulates the concerns of women of colour who are doubly marginalized under white heteropatriarchy in ways that are not identical to the experiences of either white women
or men of colour.\textsuperscript{121} An intersectional perspective is essential to understanding My Secrets disclosures.

\textbf{2.2 Gendered Harassment as Classed Violence in My Secrets}

Instances of bullying related within my sample are most often gendered harassment. Of the seventy-six girls and women who spoke about bullying, thirty-six (that is, 47\% of them) explicitly mentioned gendered slurs. Twenty of these thirty-six relocated because of their experiences of gender-based harassment. Of these, ten moved with their entire family, seven dropped out of school, two ran away from home and one moved states with her sister. The most common words the girls report being called are “slut,” “whore,” “bitch,” “cunt,” and “attention whore,” followed by comments about their appearance including being called either “fat” or “too skinny,” or sometimes both. Within the My Secrets narratives, the most common time for the onset of these words being used against the narrators is in grade three, although a few girls mentioned being called these names earlier and some starting as late as grade nine. Often the girls express confusion at being called a “slut” when they were still virgins. In VID-005, the narrator, a high school freshman, lives with her grandmother because of family violence. Her father is a violent alcoholic who hurts her mother and two sisters, both of whom are significantly older than she is. Her mother told her it would be safer to live away from her father. She has been harassed by peers both online and in person since middle school. This was initiated by a group of girls who said they started harassing her because she doesn’t live with her

parents. She reports being called names: “fake, copier, skank, slut, whore, cunt, ugly, stupid, bitch, etc.” She goes on to say, “funny thing though… I’m a virgin and I don’t fool around.” In VID-109, the narrator sent a topless picture to a high school senior when she was in grade nine after he pressured her to do so. He shared the photo with everyone in school, including her principal, and also sent it to her parents. She reports being called a number of gendered slurs, including: “ugly, easy, freak, anorexic, fat, bitch, cunt and whore.” She says, “I’m still a virgin. I’ve never done anything to deserve being called a whore.”

Interestingly, it is often other girls who use these gendered slurs against the videographers. This use of the word slut here matches closely with those observed in an ethnographic study on slut-shaming practices of white university women, entitled “‘Good Girls’: Gender, Social Class and Slut Discourse on Campus.” In this paper Armstrong, Hamilton, Armstrong, and Seeley argue that slut-shaming is divorced from actual sexual behavior and is rather used by middle- and upper-class “high status” white women against lower status women to maintain class dominance. Straight white women from higher classes who can afford to dress in expensive designer clothes and who are conventionally attractive are considered “classy and demure,” and thus benefit from a system which privileges their expression of gender and sexuality. These women, the

authors argue, therefore have a vested interest in keeping lower-class signifiers sexually stigmatized. For high status women, dressing “trashy” was more indicative of being a “slut” than actual sexual behavior. Lower-class girls are often at a disadvantage in social settings with middle-class girls because there are a variety of unstated class rules such as appropriate make-up brands, dress length, body language, and dancing style that richer girls are taught. Lower-class women, in contrast, equated “sluttiness” with sex outside of a relationship, rudeness, and unkindness in upper-class women. The authors found that while both lower- and higher-class women use slut-shaming discourse to distance themselves from the other group’s performance of gender, only higher status women had the ability to impact the social standing of other women and be successful at publicly shaming. High status women in their study were “virtually exempt” from stigma. When lower status women in their study attempted to make friends with higher status women, the higher status women would deploy the word “slut” in a public way that stigmatized the women and ruined the lower-class girls’ reputations. This particular study only looked at the behavior of white women; however, the authors acknowledge the intersections of gender, race, and class whereby racialized people are marked as sexually deviant. Race and class have been used as signifiers of stigmatized sexuality even though “class and race have no necessary connection with sexual behavior.”123 While the girls in this study are several years older than the average age in my sample, this use of slut-shaming discourse along class lines clearly begins at younger ages.

123 Ibid., 103.
In my sample, a number of girls who were victims of gender bullying claimed to be bullied for class reasons. The narrator in VID-005 made friends with three girls who found out about her parents’ class status and experiences of family violence, and this is when her experience of being bullied and socially stigmatized began. In VID-004, the narrator began being bullied because she grew up poor and “didn’t have expensive things.” In VID-059, the narrator lived in a trailer as a child. She says: “My family wasn’t ‘rich’ so I didn’t have name brand clothing and I got bullied for it.” In grade three, peers starting calling her “whore” and “slut,” and as she got older she was mocked for her large breasts and spit on by older students. Her mother was a drug addict who beat her and her grandmother. The narrator’s mother would often also deploy words like “slut” against the narrator while beating her. The mother was briefly removed from the home. “She was not allowed around us for two months/ when she came back. Nothing changed.” When the narrator was ten, she was briefly placed in foster care. In high school, she was ostracized and accused of “doing crack…like [her] mother.” The narrator dropped out of school due to the bullying and found support in a youth drop-in centre. Ten of the narrators disclosed living in poverty, and four of them had previously been homeless. In other videos outside of these ten, it is clear the bullying is at least in part classed even when the narrator has not disclosed their class status.

In VID-150, the narrator lives with her abusive mother, who also deploys words like “slut” against her daughter while beating her, and accuses her of sexually inappropriate behavior. This narrator does not disclose her class status explicitly; however, she does say that she belongs to a group of girls at her school known as “the dirties,” and that all the girls in her group get bullied. For most of the girls, divorce, death
of a parent, or experiences of violence preceded their experience of bullying. In VID-099, the narrator tells viewers that her mother died in a car accident when she was nine; she is also called a “slut” and a “whore.” Nine narrators who experienced gender-based harassment had lived in foster care. Some girls are bullied because they date outside their social class. In VID-139, the narrator was bullied not because of her class status but because she was dating a boy of a lower social status than she, and there were rumors that she was pregnant. After she came out as bisexual, she was also called “slut,” “whore,” and “attention whore.” Her friends spread rumors about her experience of being molested, and her peers began saying she had sex with her cousin (in reference to her molestation). Surprisingly, only three women of colour report having gendered slurs used against them. This may be because the women of colour in my sample are disproportionately adults, and gendered slurs are more relevant for high school and college students.

2.2.1 Gendered Harassment in Suicide Cases

Gendered harassment is also a component in most of the reported suicides of young women within my research. Peers called Amanda Todd a “slut” and a “prostitute” both in person and on her Facebook wall. This kind of harassment is not restricted to just Amanda’s case. Twelve-year-old Gabrielle Molina, a Latina girl from New York, killed herself after being beaten by classmates who put the video of the beating on YouTube. The school organized a mediation session with the guidance counselor between Gabrielle and the girl who beat her up, but the video was not removed from Youtube. Gabrielle left a suicide note detailing her experiences being harassed online and offline by her peers.
Her mother explains: “They called her a slut and a whore. All this she wrote in her journal.”

Rachel Ehmke, a thirteen-year-old girl from Minnesota, had the word “slut” scrawled across her locker. She was also called “a prostitute” although she had “never kissed a boy,” and was physically threatened and attacked by groups of students. An anonymous text was also sent out to all of her classmates accusing her of being a slut and telling them that she should be harassed out of school. According to ten-year-old Ashlynn Conner’s mother, peers physically attacked her daughter and “called her ‘fat,’ ‘ugly,’ and ‘a slut’ the day before she hanged herself in her bedroom closet.” Ashlynn came from a poor family. As with many girls from poor families, her death was ruled by investigators not to be the result of bullying but rather the result of living in a violent household with a

124 Joseph Stepansky, Vera Chinese, Tom Tracy, Ben Chapman, and Ginger Adams Otis, “Queens Girl, 12, Hangs Herself as It’s Revealed School Cyberbullies Called ‘Her a Slut and a Whore’,” *New York Daily News*, May 23, 2013,

125 Emmeline Zhao, “Rachel Ehmke, 13-Year-Old Minnesota Student, Commits Suicide After Months Of Bullying,” *The Huffington Post*, May 8, 2012,

depressed mother and grandmother.127 Ashlynn’s case is not, however, incompatible with other cases in my My Secrets sample, in which girls were called by gendered slurs because they were poor and had experienced violence.

Amanda Cummings was also called a “slut” by her classmates. Amanda was another girl from a lower class background, who lived with her single mother and adult sister—also a single mother. According to one article,

Amanda often drew the ire of peers for her refusal to conform. A natural blonde, Amanda had dyed her hair black. She also pierced her lip about a month ago…and was ridiculed by classmates when she wore makeup or high heels.128

Prior to her suicide, Amanda’s classmates pulled a knife on her, beat her up, and stole her phone, jacket, and shoes.129 Amanda jumped in front of a bus in 2011. While she was on life support in the hospital, gendered slurs were directed toward her online and her family and friends were harassed. According to her uncle, classmates were “posting cruel,

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inappropriate comments on Amanda’s Facebook wall while [she was] in the hospital after being struck by the bus.”\textsuperscript{130} Hate pages about Amanda were also made on Facebook. After her death, Amanda’s Facebook memorial page was bombarded with hate messages, gendered slurs, pornography, disturbing images of gore, and memes joking about her death all similar in tone and content to those posted prior to her death. “RIP Trolls”\textsuperscript{131} also attacked Amanda Cummings’ Facebook memorial page. Similar hate pages were made about Amanda Todd both after her first suicide attempt, and after her death. Both Amanda Todd’s and Rehtaeh Parsons’ families\textsuperscript{132} are media savvy middle-class families who have written personal accounts of what happened to their daughters and have been invited by the media to give their own accounts in ways that brought them sympathy and public support.\textsuperscript{133} In the case of Amanda Cummings, her family’s account is treated as suspect, with the \textit{Daily Mail} reporting,

\begin{quote}

131 RIP Trolls are a group of people who post upsetting or inflammatory images on the Facebook memorial pages of young women. See Chapter 3 for more on this.


133 According to Carol Todd’s article for the Huffington post, which has since been deleted, she lived for two weeks with \textit{Vancouver Sun} journalists Gillian Shaw and Mark Yuen, who won an award for best coverage of Amanda Todd’s case. “They didn’t stay as journalist and photographer. They have become life-long friends who shared the journey of loss with
While some friends and family were certain that she was bullied, official investigators have ruled that out as the main factor in her suicide. Instead it is now thought that her tendency to fall hard for boys, her history of depression, and an increase in her drinking and smoking, all converged to a tragic tipping point. Like Amanda Todd, all of the girls mentioned in this section were physically assaulted by groups of people that they knew prior to their suicides. These assaults remain a side note in articles about their deaths, which tend to focus on verbal rather than physical assaults. It is also striking that most of the cases mentioned in this section involve people from lower class backgrounds, and all these cases apart from that of Gabrielle Molina (whose case is still being investigated) were ruled by investigators as suicides unrelated to bullying.

2.2.2 Gendered Harassment Following Sexual Violence

me…Gillian and Mark assimilated into life. They answered the door. Took flowers in. Gave out tissues. Answered phone calls that were probably other media outlets. They prepared food and washed dishes….thank-you Gillian for trusting me and allowing me to read what you had written before you sent your pieces to your editor. Together we got the stories and details right” Carol Todd, “After I Lost Amanda, These Journalists Helped Me Grieve,” Huffington Post, November 1, 2013. A cached copy can be found here: twitdoc.com/2FN3

In my total sample of 162 videos, eighteen girls were raped and sixteen experienced unspecified sexual assaults. Many of the girls report never telling anyone about these assaults prior to their My Secrets videos. Of the seven girls who had told people about their assault, three had an associated court case. All seven of these girls were bullied after their experiences of sexual assault were made public. In VID-029, the narrator reports being raped by an eighteen-year-old man when she was thirteen. After news of her rape got out, she was constantly teased and called a “slut” and “disgusting.” “They all laughed at me,” she says, “even some of my best friends.” People told her that she had AIDS. “I got calls from blocked numbers saying that I was a whore,” she states. In VID-080, the narrator also reports being called a slut after her rape. She took the rapist to court but there was not enough evidence to convict him. “I went from an innocent 14 year old with friends,” she relates, “to the girl who got him in trouble.” In VID-087, the narrator tells viewers about how she was sexually and physically abused as a child and then raped in a parking lot by a male friend she had previously known and liked. After the rape her friends rejected her and called her “a whore.”

There are a number of reports in the media of cases where rape victims have been mocked and harassed after sexual assault. Daisy Coleman (who was fourteen at the time) and her friend (who was thirteen) were both drugged and raped, the rape was filmed, and Daisy was left in the snow unconscious outside her house. After she went to the police, people in her home town started to call her gendered slurs. The family had to relocate due
to the harassment, and their house was subsequently burned down. According to Daisy's account in *XOJane*, after her rape she “was suspended from the cheerleading squad and people told [her] that [she] was ‘asking for it’ and would ‘get what was coming.’” One girl on her cheerleading squad had a novelty t-shirt made to shame Daisy that said “Matt 1, Daisy 0” (Matt was the name of her rapist). The boy she accused was a prominent member of the community and a football player; the charges against him were dropped.

2.2.3 Gendered Harassment Following Rape in Suicide Cases

In 2010, three teenage boys sexually assaulted a California girl named Audrie Pott. They also wrote derogatory statements and gendered slurs on her body with a Sharpie marker. They photographed the assault and put the photographs on the Internet, and her pictures went viral. Audrie killed herself after the gendered harassment she faced over these pictures. Similarly, in Halifax in 2013, peers shamed Rehteah Parsons


following a sexual assault. Four boys allegedly sexually assaulted her and took pictures of the assault. She was subsequently subjected to gendered slurs by members of the community who called her a “slut.” According to her mother,

she was never left alone. She had to leave the community. Her friends turned against her. People harassed her. Boys she didn’t know started texting her and Facebooking her asking her to have sex with them. It just never stopped.138

This shaming was not limited to community members. Some media articles also continued this shaming discourse. News commentator Christie Blachford argues that Rehtaeh was not a victim of sexual assault but rather engaged in consensual sex, and that she was flirting and “even egging the boys on.”139 Blachford goes on to explain that this story is a story about “a young woman filled with regret for what she portrayed as consensual sex with two boys and who was now afraid her friends would think her ‘a


slut.’” The shame of the pictures, says Blachford, is what made Rehteah claim to be raped. 

In Armstrong et al., interviews revealed that for higher status girls the word “slut” was a designator for any behavior that drew attention to a woman. Short skirts, dancing, and drinking were all indicative of “slutty” behavior. While the authors disagree with theorists who see slut-shaming as internalized oppression, I feel this vilification of attention could be internalized victim-blaming messaging about avoiding sexual assault. If a woman is raped, in this discourse, it is because she has courted male attention. This may help to explain why women as well as men slut-shame rape victims.

2.2.4 Gendered Harassment for “Attention Seeking”

Many of the girls in my sample who reported bullying were subjected to accusations of attention seeking. This is entirely gendered—none of the men were accused of attention seeking—and the gendered slur “attention whore” often accompanied this accusation. Accusations of being an attention whore are also common in the comments section of popular videos in this sample. Perhaps as a way to protect themselves and distance themselves from this label, twenty of the girls in my total sample

140 The Internet group Anonymous intervened in this case, releasing evidence about Rehteah’s rape. Due to subsequent public pressure, charges were laid against two of the four boys. They are being tried under child pornography law. There is a current publication ban on Rehteah’s name because under the law the press cannot identify the victim of child pornography. Rehteah’s mother has launched a campaign called “Rehteah Parsons is her name” on Facebook.

141 Armstrong et al., “Good Girls.”

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explicitly say in their video or their YouTube video description that they are not seeking attention, but instead are seeking to help others. Many more simply say that they are not seeking attention.

A Seventeen magazine article from April 2012 about the My Secrets genre explicitly warns girls against attention seeking. The article explains that the “lowest” kind of comment accuses posters of attention seeking. In a section titled “4 Questions to Ask Yourself Before You Post,” the first question is,

What is the reason? Be honest: are you secretly posting the video for payback, attention, or to impress someone? If so, people will see through it and the backlash could be worse than the hurt you are feeling now. Many posters get criticized for “wanting attention.”

It is interesting that the article blames the people posting the videos for the negative attention they receive rather than questioning the discursive framework that equates disclosure of violence or pain with attention seeking. The next three questions—“Am I ok with this forever?,” “Who is there for me?,” and “Will it hurt someone?”—caution readers against sharing stories of sexual violence without first contacting a lawyer. As well, the article cautions against coming out of the closet or sharing stories of family violence: “If you feel family members could be hostile, or throw you out, you might want to reconsider posting.” Accusations of “doing it for attention” work to delegitimize the claims of the women who make these videos, and these questions in particular are

\[\text{142 Eagleson, “What’s Your Secret?,” 147.}\]

\[\text{143 Ibid.}\]
designed to discourage girls from sharing their stories of sexual and family violence online, even though the rest of the article is fairly positive about the genre.

Figure 7 Amanda Todd Video Description: “I’m not doing this for attention.”

Posted one month before suicide attempt.

As the book about Amanda Todd, *Extreme Mean*, chronicles, the Internet is littered with accusations that Amanda was “looking for attention,” either by making the video or by showing her breasts, and thus got what “she deserved.” She must have been aware of this narrative because she, like so many other women in the My Secrets genre, included the phrase “I’m not doing this for attention” in her video description.

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144 Bethune, “The Interview.”
2.2.5 Girlhood as a Regulatory Site of Attention

In her book *The Aftermath of Feminism* Angela McRobbie argues that the figure of the girl occupies particular “luminous spaces of attention” in neoliberal culture. She uses this phrase, borrowing from Deleuze, to describe a series of focused regulatory and surveillance practices that serve to reinscribe the heterosexual matrix. Girls, she argues, are the focus of an inordinate amount of attention both legislatively and in the media because they stand in as a symbol which backs up neoliberal “post-feminist” claims that the fight for equal rights has largely been won. Girls—particularly white, middle-class, college-bound girls—who work hard and make the correct capitalist choices stand as a...
symbol for the success of neoliberal policies. Correspondingly, girls are punished more harshly for making the “wrong choices,” such as single motherhood and taking low waged work. McRobbie explains,

…governmental vocabulary of self-responsibility personalizes disadvantage and marks out poverty and economic hardship as issues connected with family dysfunctionality rather than a socially generated phenomenon… [Thus women without access to educational opportunities] become all the more emphatically condemned for their lack of status and other failings than would have been the case in the past.\footnote{McRobbie, \textit{Aftermath}, 77-78.}

Neoliberal claims that equality has been achieved have been very successful; McRobbie points to scores of articles that claim men are now the disadvantaged party in secondary and post-secondary education. “The impact of class inequalities, racism and the sheer persistence of insurmountable obstacles for girls growing up in poverty are eclipsed by the emphasis” on college-aged white middle-class girls and their supposed success.\footnote{Ibid., 73.} There has also been a move in the popular media to shame the “habits and appearance” of low-income women in the name of reality television entertainment. With post-feminism comes post-racism and the expectation that women of colour will assimilate into the norms of whiteness. McRobbie points out that since the early 2000s there has been “a very noticeable decrease in images of black and Asian women”\footnote{Ibid., 69.} in the media. She argues that pressure to assimilate is “a kind of racial violence within the celebratory white visual economies.”\footnote{Ibid., 71.} McRobbie also makes note of the enormous

\footnote{Ibid., \textit{Aftermath}, 77-78.} \footnote{Ibid., 73.} \footnote{Ibid., 69.} \footnote{Ibid., 71.}
pressure girls face to control their emotions; those who experience anger or despair should clearly be in some kind of therapy or psychological counseling. This focus of media and government attention on white, middle-class girlhood and the appropriate habits, ambitions, behaviors, fashions, and regimens of self-help, exercise, and therapy that girls should adopt could perhaps explain the anger directed at girls, as a category, for “attention seeking.”\(^{149}\) The logic is the same as that of the shaming after rape. If girls are getting attention, they must be seeking it.

McRobbie was writing in 2008, a year before the media explosion of teenage suicides. At this time, McRobbie was pointing out that women’s supposed sexual freedom was one of the luminous spaces of attention that women occupy. “So long as she does not procreate while enjoying causal and recreational sex,” McRobbie writes, “the young woman is entitled to pursue sexual desire seemingly without punishment.”\(^{150}\) The divide to which McRobbie draws attention here is between women who reproduce “responsibly” within a heterosexual relationship, and those who do not. This new sexual double standard, she argues, creates deeper divides between lesbians and straight women. She says that while hostility and old-fashioned insults are still thrown towards girls, for the most part “women are no longer punished in quite the same way for pursuing sexual

\(^{149}\) The success of neoliberal stories about girlhood lead to lower-class girls being multiply punished, both for failing to live up to the neoliberal regimes that are supposed to lead to success and for the attention middle-class girls receive. Misogynist harassers do not have a nuanced class analysis.

\(^{150}\) Ibid., 85.
desires” so long as they do this while delaying motherhood and embodying certain capitalist modes of being. Judging by the accounts of the young women in the My Secrets genre, however, it seems that girls are being punished for sexual behavior and that their behavior is being more strictly regulated than it was in 2009.

2.3 Cyberbullying

Only eight people in my sample disclosed any experiences of cyberbullying, and all those who did were being harassed online by peers regarding their appearance or supposed sexual preference or activity. This online harassment was an extension of what they faced in person at school. Seven of those eight were female and one was male, all of them white. Two girls had their pictures shared. In one of these cases, a girl had her picture shared by a current boyfriend. In the other case, a sexual picture of a fourteen-year-old girl was shared by a high school senior, resulting in subsequent harassment of the girl both by her peers, and—after her picture was posted to the Internet with a link to her Facebook—by men she did not know. There was one additional case in which a girl may have been targeted by an online pedophile, and this girl was already facing extreme violence at home from her father [Figure 9]. In VID-075, a girl who seems very young, twelve at the oldest, holds up a series of misspelled cards about being raped by her father. She also explains that she went online and met a person she thought was a boy her own age with whom she thought she could talk about it, but he turned out to be an adult man who subsequently blackmailed her into performing for him. When she stopped

151 Ibid., 85.
performing, he contacted her father. Both of these men told her that she would go to jail because what she had done—having sex with her father and performing for a man—was illegal. Her father subsequently went on a business trip and she told her mother about the situation. There is now an ongoing court case. Her account is quite unclear, and it is ambiguous if the man talking to her online knew her father, or was her father in disguise. Hers is the only video to feature a dangerous stranger online, and there is a possibility that this stranger was someone connected to her family.

Figure 9 VID-075 “When I was 8, 7, or younger, my dad started raping me! :(”

2.3.1 Self-Harm in My Secrets

After bullying, the second most common disclosure in my sample is about self-harm, with seventy-six of the 162 videos containing some self-harm content (47% of the total sample). Of the eighty-two videos with bullying content, fifty-three also contained self-harm content (65% of the bullied sample). Angela McRobbie has argued that self-harm among girls is a “post-feminist” condition: the new “problem with no name” for
middle-class white women. According to McRobbie, cutting is one of the “healthy signs of unhealthy femininity”—the way girls with illegible rage express themselves. “Better to be an ill girl,” quips McRobbie, “than a girl who gets up out of her sick bed and challenges the heterosexual matrix.”\textsuperscript{152} She argues that the circumstances of being a girl in neoliberal culture make girls cut, starve, and self-harm, and that these practices are then taken as something naturally endemic to the biology and psychology of girls.

My sample data offers a counter narrative to this understanding of self-harm as naturally endemic to girlness. Within the My Secrets videos sampled, cutting was the most common form of self-harm disclosed, and almost all of those who disclosed cutting said that they began their self-harm after being traumatized. Thirty-seven of them (70%) began cutting after experiences of harassment, such as having been explicitly told by peers to “kill themselves” or that they were “worthless sluts”; twenty-four (45%) began cutting after experiences of physical or sexual assault; and fifteen (28%) after having experienced both. The narrator of VID-101 explains that she started cutting because she was abandoned by her father who said he did not want her anymore, and because she was simultaneously being harassed via social media by peers from school who called her “an ugly slut.” She said she turned to cutting, “not for attention, but because [she] felt [she] deserved the pain.” Of the seven additional narrators that disclosed self-harm without falling into any of the above categories, five likewise identified a precipitating traumatic event—in two cases the suicide of a parent—and the remaining two had diagnoses of borderline personality disorder. The narrators in twenty-eight videos disclosed suicide

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., 96.
attempts, and fifteen more talked about suicidal thoughts. The narrators in twenty-four videos disclosed an eating disorder; this was also closely tied with disclosures of sexual assault and molestation.\textsuperscript{153} Five of those who admitted to self-harm disclosed burning, and nine disclosed unspecified harm.

Girls are told to kill themselves, and they immediately go home and start cutting. They are physically and sexually hurt by their parents or friends, and they go to their room and self-harm. While McRobbie calls this a white middle-class girls’ problem, 100\% of the people in my sample who disclosed poverty also disclosed cutting, as did all the youth who were in foster care. Two white boys in my sample admitted to self-harm. Twelve of the people who disclosed self-harm were people of colour: ten girls and two boys. The stories clearly describe that self-harm came after traumatic experiences and violence. Self-harm may be illegible to others, but it is not illegible to the girls and boys who inflict bodily harm on themselves in order to dull their pain.

2.4 Issues of Race and Racism in Bullying Narratives

The universalization of bullying narratives positions bullying and suicide as something that could happen to anyone. Very few personal narratives by people of colour about bullying experiences exist in the media, however. Searching for personal stories, I instead found statistics, including a report that Indigenous youth face higher incidents of

\textsuperscript{153} Eight videographers, or one-third of those who disclosed disordered eating, also disclosed having been sexually assaulted.
bullying\textsuperscript{154} than other groups, and a study titled “Black Teens, Especially Girls, at High Risk for Suicide Attempts”\textsuperscript{155} which explains that “at some point before they reach 17 years of age, 4 percent of black teens, and more than 7 percent of black teen females, will attempt suicide.” On the whole, bullying discourses reduce people of colour to statistics, while white people (or those who pass as white) get personal narratives. In a study on bias in media coverage of bullying-related suicide, Lok et al.\textsuperscript{156} compared media coverage of the cases of two teenagers who committed suicide following bullying incidents: Phoebe Prince, a white middle-class girl from the suburbs, and Carl Walker Hoover, an eleven-year-old, black, gay boy from a working class background. The authors found that there were a greater number of news stories about Phoebe, outnumbering stories focusing on Carl two to one. Additionally, the stories about Phoebe were more positive in nature, labeling her as “intelligent” and “attractive,” while the media did not mention anything complimentary about Carl. The study concluded that white privilege and social capital strongly influence media discourses. Terminology too is


\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{156} Lok and Chartier, “Why Are Some Bullying Victims More Newsworthy.”}
key: Phoebe’s case has been referred to as “cyberbullying” while Carl’s was not.\textsuperscript{157} There was, in fact, hesitation on the part of the media to accept Carl’s case as a case of bullying, referring to his story as “alleged bullying.”

Some articles about violence experienced by young people of colour barely feature the word “bullying” at all. In a local Los Angeles newspaper called \textit{Our Weekly}, I found an article about an unnamed young black man, which reads,

\begin{quote}
Reported missing teen commits suicide: A 13-year-old boy who went missing in Palmdale after he became despondent over being suspended from school for fighting has shot himself to death in Kern County, authorities said today.\textsuperscript{158}
\end{quote}

The article goes on to explain that when school authorities heard the boy had a gun, they locked down the school for fear he would harm the other children. The article ends with the information that “the boy, a cheerleader at the school, was being bullied and last week got into a fight with another student” which led to his suspension. Bullying is not featured in this article until the last sentence; before then, it is simply framed as “fighting.” What is framed by the media (and taken up by the public) as “bullying” versus “fighting,” or “cyberbullying” versus a disagreement with students, is not only class-dependent but also


race-dependent. This differentiation becomes clearly evident when we compare the coverage of Rehteah Parsons’ case with media reports and public response regarding the similar case of Felicia Garcia.

2.4.1 Race and The Problem of Cyberbullying: Felicia Garcia, Rehteah Parsons, and Anonymous

The case of Felicia Garcia bears remarkable similarities to that of Rehteah Parsons. Felicia Garcia was a fifteen-year-old Latina orphan who jumped in front of a New York subway train on Oct. 22, 2012, a few days after Amanda Todd’s suicide. Some articles claim that she was being “teased” because she had sex with four football players simultaneously at a party, and that this “sent Felicia into the final tailspin in a long-troubled life.”

Piecing together stories from multiple articles, it seems that Felicia


had dated one of the football players a few months before, and that her ex and a group of football players had subsequently tormented her to the point that she had sought help from the school. The school arranged a mediation session. The weekend prior to the arranged mediation session, she “had sex” at a party with four of her tormentors, who allegedly photographed and video-recorded the encounter. On Monday morning, when they started tormenting her again, she tweeted “I can’t. I’m done. I give up,” and jumped to her death. Several articles included a picture of her badly bloodied and battered face—an image that she had posted on Instagram after the encounter with the football players. The explanation for this picture according to the articles was that she was showing the world she was “depressed.”

Her friends told reporters that Felicia was

Teenage Girl’s Suicide,” *New York Times*, October 25, 2012,  

161 Frank Donnelly, “2 Students Removed from Staten Island’s Tottenville HS for Taunting Felicia Garcia,” *SILive.com*, October 26, 2012,  

162 Chapman et al., “Tormented 15-year-old”

163 Pow, “I can’t, I’m done.”
being “tortured” by the football players; however, the reporters doubted their accounts.\textsuperscript{164} None of the articles even hint at the possibility of sexual violence with the exception of one featured in online feminist magazine \textit{Jezebel}, in which the author writes, “she had sex with four football players at the same time at a party the previous weekend. Repulsively, the football players were allegedly doing quite a bit of that bullying. I’d really like to know exactly what went on there.”\textsuperscript{165} In the aftermath of Felicia’s death, the football players had their game suspended from Friday until Sunday as punishment for the “alleged bullying.”\textsuperscript{166} 

Both Rehteah Parsons and Felicia Garcia had their sexual assaults filmed. Following both girls’ suicides, media articles were released which expressed doubt regarding accounts of bullying and sexual assault. In Rehteah Parsons’ case, as in the case

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of Amanda Todd, the Internet hacking group Anonymous intervened.\textsuperscript{167} The resulting public outrage that Rehteah’s case was not being treated as a rape resulted in multiple police inquiries, and eventually government pressure forced the police to reopen the case. Rehteah Parsons’ case is now widely regarded in Canada as one of the poster girl cases for “cyberbullying,” and her family has been invited to speak to the media and parliament about proposed cyberbullying legislation. Felicia Garcia’s death sparked no equivalent public outrage to that provoked by the deaths of Amanda Todd and Rehteah Parsons, both of whom had white middle-class family members (Amanda Todd’s father is white) who wrote their own accounts of what happened both in the mainstream media and on social media. Felicia’s story—framed as “a tragic end to a troubled life”\textsuperscript{168}—did not inspire Anonymous or other web-based activists to cry for justice. The police investigation closed March 2014, and no charges will be laid.\textsuperscript{169}

\textbf{2.4.2 Racist Harassment in My Secrets}


\textsuperscript{168} Chapman et al., “Tormented 15-year-old.”

Of the forty-two people of colour in my sample, seventeen (40%) disclosed in their videos that they had been bullied. If we remove the adults from our count, the number rises to 50%, which is consistent with the rate of bullying in the My Secrets genre overall. Of these seventeen, eight people were explicit about specific instances of racism. The narrator in VID-116 had her hair weave pulled off by classmates—“Everyday!” The narrator in VID-160 was harassed for being of mixed heritage (Asian, black and Indigenous), and for having dark skin. “[As a young person,] I wished I looked like everyone else,” she says. “Now [as an adult] I am loving the colour of my skin!” The narrator in VID-040 was bullied because she is an Asian girl who was adopted by white parents; kids would ask her why her skin was so dark. The narrator in VID-100 began to be bullied in fifth grade for being Jewish. From sixth to eighth grade, she “got called names, harassed, and even got change thrown at [her],” had swastikas drawn on her locker, and was told to kill herself and that she deserved to be burned alive. Her mother had to pull her out of school. She was sent to a forensic psychologist, who diagnosed her with depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) due to the violence she experienced at home and the harassment she received at school.

2.5 Homophobic Harassment and Violence in My Secrets
Figure 10 VID-088 “I’m Gay <3”

There were ten cases of explicitly homophobic harassment by peers in my sample of eighty-two bullied youth. Of these, five were male and five were female. Of the five girls who reported homophobic bullying such as being called a “lesbian” or “dyke,” four were also called “sluts.” This is consistent with the claim in Armstrong et al. that the word “slut” is often deployed as a way to shore up particular heterosexual middle-class privilege. The cases of homophobic harassment were not restricted to the videographers who self-identified as queer in their videos. Three of the girls who were homophobically harassed by peers did not identify their sexuality in the video, and one of

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170 Armstrong et al., “‘Good Girls’: Gender, Social Class.”
the girls self-identified as straight. Two boys who did not disclose their sexuality in their video experienced homophobic harassment. One of these boys was Jonah Mowry, who came out on national television as gay after he made his video. In VID-126, the narrator, Aby, was bullied starting in seventh grade because her best friend was a lesbian, and there were rumours that they were dating. People threw pencils at Aby, pushed her into walls and off the stage, and called her “slut” and “whore.” Girls in Aby’s class created an “Anti-Aby” group on Facebook. Two of her bullies were expelled, and subsequently egged her house and sent death threats. The narrator of VID-119 is a boy who does not disclose his sexuality. He was harassed at school and called “fag” and “skank.” He saw a counselor every day, and says the counseling “worked!” The benefits he found in seeing a counselor were temporary. He has since become depressed again because the harassment has gotten worse and he is now being harassed both at school and on his personal Tumblr page.

Figure 11 VID-027 “I’m Gay :)”
Homophobic harassment was the only major problem identified by two white boys in my sample. This was not true for the rest of the homophobically bullied sample, who faced multiple issues in addition to homophobic harrassment. There was a much higher instance of rape, violence and sexual abuse among the group of self-identified queer people than among the rest of the total sample. Of the eleven people in my sample who did not identify as straight: two boys were molested, one by an older boy and one by a step father; two boys of colour were raped as pre-teens by adult men; two boys of colour were beaten by gangs for being gay; one girl was raped and beaten by a family member from the age of two until she was eighteen; one girl was sexually exploited online; and five (including one girl and four boys) were physically attacked by family members. Four of the videographers were rejected by their families.

Many of the queer narrators in my sample face multiple axes of oppression. The narrator from VID-118 was physically and sexually abused her entire life. She is disabled, has multiple diagnoses including PTSD, anxiety disorder, and a binge eating disorder, is overweight, and has an STI.
The narrator of VID-027, a black gay man, had to walk to school through gangs who threw sticks and rocks at him and called him homophobic slurs. He says he still has scars on his back. One day one of the men raped him. In VID-088, the narrator, who is a man of colour, reports being raped at ten years old by a male relative. His parents “hate him for being gay and think it’s disgusting.” He was physically abused his entire life, relating, “I ran away as a teenager 4 times. Police found me every time [and brought me back home].” He discovered as an adult that his father who raised him was not his biological father, and that his biological father is HIV positive—“so [his] whole life [he] was lied to.” In VID-129, the narrator, a Latino teenager, relates being rejected by his parents, beaten by his brother’s gang, and tormented by peers because he is gay. In VID-128, the narrator—who identifies as male and bisexual—reports being tormented at school after he came out; he was also physically abused by his grandfather, who tried to drown him. This narrator specifies that he is male—“I’M A FREAKING BOY!”—and without this specification I would have misgendered him. He explains that his abuse at school is so bad that he doesn’t go anymore. It could be that harassment over his gender presentation is compounding the experience of homophobic harassment that he faces. All of these disclosures are consistent with research about the experiences of LGBTQ youth, specifically that LGBTQ youth are more likely to drop out of school, become homeless, and experience violence than are their straight peers. 

Figure 13 VID-128 “AND I’M A FREAKING BOY!”
2.6 When “It” doesn’t “Get Better”

One of the most culturally popular interventions against homophobic bullying is the “It Gets Better Project,” mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. The problem, with homophobic bullying, according to the project’s co-founder Dan Savage, is that queer youth do not have hope for the future: “A bullied gay teenager who ends his life is saying that he can’t picture a future with enough joy in it to compensate for the pain he’s in now.”\(^\text{172}\) LGBTQ youth may face “torture” in high school, Savage explains,\(^\text{173}\) but once the kids graduate their life will improve. In an article for the \textit{Guardian}, academic feminist and post-colonial scholar Jasbir Puar outlines some of problems with the It Gets Better campaign, notably that Savage is a white, able-bodied, middle-class, successful man who “embodies the spirit of a coming-of-age success story,” and that his message “translates to: Come out, move to the city, travel to Paris, adopt a kid, pay your taxes, demand representation.”\(^\text{174}\) Puar highlights that this neoliberal tale of pulling oneself up by the bootstraps glosses over the fact that “it gets better” for some at the expense of others, and that the “upset generated by these deaths [the suicides of white gay teenaged boys] is precisely afforded through a fundamental belief that things \textit{are} indeed, better, especially

\begin{itemize}
\item \(^\text{173}\) Ibid., 6.
\end{itemize}
for a particular class of white gay men.” For people of colour or the working class, the better life in the big city is not a guarantee. We see this with the disclosures of My Secrets, in which homophobic harassment, for all but the two white boys, was related as part of a continuum of violence, experienced along with poverty, family violence, and racism.

In her paper “Does Anyone Have a Band-Aid?” Lori Macintosh argues that gay-straight alliances and “similar organizationally institutionalized spaces” (and I would argue that It Gets Better is among these) “are often problematically positioned as the only means through which a sexual minority youth can safely articulate his or her identity.” These highly visible spaces create an idealized role model queer, one who is happy to educate straight allies, and against whom other young queers are measured. “Thus it is against the positive role model that closeted, queer, ambiguous, and other nonconforming and resistant bodies are measured and disciplined.”

With the role model there comes the abject counterpart of the failed queer body, the one who does not live up to the ideal. This can lead queer youth to feel pressured to frame their stories in It Gets Better terms. Jamie Hubley, a gay boy from Ottawa, killed himself after making an It Gets Better YouTube video in Fall 2011. In a suicide note left on his Tumblr site, he wrote, “I don’t

want to wait 3 more years, this hurts too much. How do you even know it will get better? Its not.”

In a particularly curmudgeonly critique, queer theorist Jack Halberstam argues that the trouble with It Gets Better is that it is training queer youth to see trauma where none exists. The poor coddled children are taught to jump at shadows and cry over even the possibility of proverbial spilt milk. According to Halberstam,

In queer communities, some people are now committed to an “It Gets Better” version of consciousness-raising within which suicidal, depressed and bullied young gays and lesbians struggle like emperor penguins in a blighted arctic landscape to make it through the winter of childhood.

He argues that therapists, psychotherapeutic regimes, and “friendly adults” train children to imagine themselves as abused and traumatized even where no abuse exists and “…then, once they ‘age out’ of their youth groups, those same LGBT youth become hypersensitive to all signs and evidence of the abuse about which they have learned.”

While I disagree with Halberstam and wonder how he would explain himself to the queer youth in my sample, I want to draw out one particularly interesting point that he makes in his critique. He talks about the discourse of “making it through the winter of childhood.”


The discursive problem here, as I see it, is not that childhood is in fact free from abuse, but that the idea of “growing out of” abuse is naturalized through It Gets Better, and is not limited to it either; I see this discourse play out everywhere in discussions of bullying. The experiences of violence are naturalized as a part of childhood, and it is presumed that these experiences of violence will end when one reaches adulthood. Thus, “bullying” is “not a big deal,” not something worthy of any intervention beyond psychological reassurance and patience.

The future that Dan Savage points to with It Gets Better is the American Dream-style fantasy of “the good life,” which as Lauren Berlant argues

is increasingly being used to justify a bad life, a present where people are worn out by economic circumstances and ordinary crises. This promise is part of “the technologies of patience” that enable a concept of the later to suspend questions about the cruelty of the now. 178

She explains that this kind of “cruel optimism” is part of what makes modern capitalism function. The appeal of It Gets Better to capitalist interests may explain why, even though there are approximately twice as many My Secrets videos as there are It Gets Better videos and they have been around for two years longer, they have not received the same kind of media attention 179—with the exception of the videos made by Amanda Todd and a handful of others discussed in the next chapter, whose stories have neoliberal appeal.


2.7 Survivorship Narratives in My Secrets: Beyond “It Gets Better”?  

Not only does the It Gets Better campaign naturalize the category of “bullying” and thus obfuscate systemic violence, but It Gets Better also naturalizes the position of survivor as the one who can speak about their violent past, rather than the one who is experiencing the problem now. The people who speak are the people for whom it has gotten better. This narrative trope has not been lost on the My Secrets videographers, seventy of whom offer some version of a “things get better” motif in their videos. The figuration of “survivor,” which comes out of the movement to end violence against women, was intended to encourage “providers to address external obstacles to a victim’s safety and well-being before addressing internal psychological issues.” However, it is often deployed in practice to evoke someone who has already overcome the problem of violence—an embodiment whereby the victimization is by necessity in the past: something one has survived.

onto My Secrets in 2011. The first My Secrets video to be featured in the news, a video by Kaitlin Brand, only received media attention because it was incorrectly called an It Gets Better video. This article explains that “Her ‘My Secrets’ video has just gone viral [because] Kait just made one of the most touching and inspiring ‘It Gets Better’ videos imaginable.” The video was not about LGBTQ issues, and it was quickly dropped from media coverage in favour of Mowry’s video.

Jennifer Dunn argues that in order for activists for social change to evoke a helping response or “political empathy” from the general public, victims need to be characterized as a particular social class worthy of sympathy. Evoking this helping response is a difficult tightrope to walk because of complex and often contradictory social expectations. Our culture is steeped in historical victim-blaming discourses in which victims with high levels of agency are viewed as culpable for and participating in their own victimization, while victims with low agency are seen as lacking in self-reliance and are thus devalued in neoliberal culture. Survivor narratives, therefore, are a way to allow for a blameless victim who, in the past, had low agency but who is now self-sufficient. Dunn explains,

Survivor typifications, while increasingly popular and theoretically more resonant, confer a kind of self-sufficiency on those so labeled that might dissuade rather than encourage assistance. “Empowerment” is increasingly a feature of survivor frames and victim advocacy... The more it focuses on the skills and agency of individual victims, the less it may address the obdurate, persistent social structures and forces with which they must yet engage.

We have no popular narrative frame with which to make sense of ongoing violence that is not considered partially the result of the psychological failures on the part of the victim. While some It Gets Better narrators like Jamey Rodemeyer or Jamie Hubley (two young men who committed suicide after posting It Gets Better videos) were still in violent

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182 Ibid., 248.
situations and did not survive, most of the narrators of It Gets Better are at a remove from violence; they have already survived it and can look back with nostalgia.

The survivor narrative trajectory in It Gets Better videos follows the arc of a particular acceptable gay sexuality that matches closely with the conventions of coming out stories. These confessions follow a pattern of discussing a painful youth, identifying a turning point where growth was able to begin, and culminating in achieving eventual happiness and success and creat[ing] an image of 'self-reliance and rugged individualism' while encouraging the pursuit of material, consumerist measures of success.183

My Secrets videos also follow a similar pattern of the narrator telling viewers about overcoming hardship and promising things will get better for viewers. However, My Secrets also offers an interesting tension with this discourse. Most of the narrators are still experiencing violence, and materialist success is not their concern. In the case of It Gets Better videos, “better” may be reducible to “richer,”184 but in the case of the My Secrets genre, things getting “better” is often defined as pushing through hardships that are acknowledged as difficult and ongoing. In VID-048, the videographer talks about her experiences of family violence; she lives with her grandmother and aunt who abuse her. She has a binge eating disorder that stems from child molestation, and her family


physically attacks her because she is overweight. In her video, she tells the audience she has been seeing a counselor and has just been given anti-depressants.

I’m proof you can get help and beat these obstacles. Help is out there I promise. A bunch of things helped me therapy, friends, telling a doctor….if you ever need to talk message me or check out links below. It gets better, I promise.

She also links to resources that the viewer may access if they need help. In a follow-up video (VID-049) made one year after her initial video, however, she says that “it has gotten better, but not much.” Her family is still abusive. She has relapses of self-harm and binge eating. She has also been sexually assaulted since the last video. In this video, she is more cautiously optimistic and she admits that three weeks into therapy may have been too soon to pronounce that It Got Better! It’s a slow process.

One of the most striking videos I have seen is VID-036, in which the narrator talks about her struggles living in the projects as a black single mom who became pregnant due to rape when she was sixteen. She says she has just gotten her GED and managed to raise two kids “out of the projects ALIVE AND WELL.” She ends her video, “Thanks for Listening. God is Good.” Then she cries for more than a minute on camera. This is a story of ongoing survival and strength, to which her tears are testimony. This is not a story where you can sit back and wait for things to improve, inevitably moving from a life of violence you will naturally age out of toward a better future you will naturally age into.
Figure 14 - VID-036 I managed to get my children out of the projects ALIVE AND WELL

2.8 Offers of support

Rather than simply offering “hope,” which is the primary narrative of It Gets Better, many My Secrets videos include concrete offers of help. Of the 162 videos in my sample, seventy-one explicitly reach out to community. The narrator of VID-101 says,

IF YOU EVER NEED ANYTHING/ CONTACT ME / STAY STRONG / i love you / 😊

The videographer of VID-132 had a difficult story. She was abused by her stepfather and put into emergency care, and a restraining order was put in place against both him and her mother. “I miss my mother more than imaginable,” she tells viewers. She was also raped by a man who made detailed death threats. Still she reaches out to the audience, saying:
Up until now, no one was there for me. / I was so close from ending everything. / Please don’t let that happen to anyone.

Not only does she ask the audience to support each other, but she also provides her personal contact information for people who feel alone. Likewise, the videographer from VID-149 offers, “If you ever need to talk, I’m here! Stay strong!” while the narrator from VID- 072 says,

Remember you are beautiful and you deserve the very best. I am here if you ever need help, I love you.

Additionally, seventeen of these seventy-one offer an explicit “call to action” that often includes a systemic analysis, for example letting the audience know the statistics on rape and violence. Some link the viewer to support websites like The Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN). The videographer of VID-014 ends her video by saying “Fight for what you want <3 Stand up and speak out!” I would argue that one of the defining features of this genre is the building of communities of care. Amanda’s video is actually unusual for the genre in that she reaches out for a community rather than to a community. While seventy-one videos in my total sample end with some permutation of “if you need anyone, I’m here for you, stay strong,” Amanda ends hers “I have no one, I need somebody.” That in itself, as we have seen, is a powerful call to action, and perhaps we need to think of forms of action—anti-racist, decolonizing, and oriented towards broad and imaginative visions of social justice—that push back against limited and limiting conceptualizations of violence, bullying, and willful colour-blindness.
Chapter 3 Beyond Bullying: Systemic Violence and Economies of Attention

3.1 Beyond Bullying

As this chapter will explore, testimony alone is often not enough to elicit change. Just because you reach out to others does not mean your story will be heard. Not every disclosure of trauma receives attention and those that do most often follow narratives that match closely with pre-existing dominant discourses about perpetrators and victims. Even when a story is heard, it can be used in ways the author did not intend. The Harper Government, for example, has used Amanda’s story to justify a bill of which Amanda, according to her mother, would not have approved. Those stories that do receive media attention are also placed under a high degree of public scrutiny that often questions the authenticity of the narrator. It is also important to remember that not everyone has access to the technology to post stories on the internet. Not every My Secrets video will be viewed. Bullying, as a discourse, is what Angela McRobbie might call a “luminous space of attention” in that the focus on bullying makes certain kinds of violence (specifically against young white women) hyper-visible, and other kinds of violence (against the vast numbers of murdered and missing women from Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside, for example) invisible. The hyper-visibility of bullying erases difference, subsuming people into a narrative that is already raced and classed as white and middle-class. Nor does

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185 McRobbie, Aftermath, 58. Luminous spaces of attention are focal points for government and disciplinary power.
hyper-visibility necessarily bring with it interventions that are useful. An analysis of the My Secrets genre, and a critique of the interventions these videos inspire, needs to take into account the history of ongoing cultures of violence and state interventions that often co-opt anti-violence groups made by and for marginalized people and further marginalize the people they are claiming to protect. Shifting focus away from bullying as an isolated category and onto interconnected systems of violence reveals key connections between the economies of attention\textsuperscript{186} and systemic violence. The first part of this chapter explores which stories get told, and what differences exist between how various stories are received. I look at the My Secrets videos that occupy that space of hyper-visible attention: the top ten most viewed videos in my sample and the five videos that, like Amanda’s, became media objects. From here I examine questions of authenticity in My Secrets and explore some of the factors that make texts culturally legible. I then move on from these videos to the stories that do not attract attention and how this pattern matches patterns of systemic violence more broadly.

\subsection*{3.2 Which videos get attention?}

Some My Secrets videos have over ten million views and have attracted the attention of the media and celebrities. Others have only fifteen views. The pattern of which videographers get attention match patterns about who gets media attention more

\textsuperscript{186} Attention economics is an approach to information management that considers human attention a scarce commodity and seeks to capture it. Advertisers, web developers, and news organizations all use it. McRobbie uses it to talk about how governments focus neoliberal interventions on particular groups.
generally. Those videos that receive attention demonstrate interesting links between social media, traditional media, and celebrity culture. The top ten most viewed videos in my sample of 162 videos are all made by thin, white, able-bodied, conventionally attractive people. These ten videos\textsuperscript{187} have an average view count of 3,215,242, which is significantly higher than the view counts for the rest of my sample combined; the average view count of the remaining 152 videos is 78,028. Of the top ten videos, three are made by young white men, though they make up only 5\% of my total sample. None of these three young men mentioned their sexuality in their videos, although two came out publicly as gay outside of the video context. Of the top ten most viewed videos, six are about bullying, one is about a life-threatening illness, one is about the suicide of a family member, and two are about depression. Nine out of the top ten are single-issue videos, which is extremely rare for My Secrets.

Seven videographers in my sample of 162 videos had some media attention associated with their stories; six of these are in the top ten. Jade Wasylenko’s (VID-122) was the first My Secrets video in my sample to receive media attention, when Justin

\textsuperscript{187} I measured the top ten videos which are the most viewed videos exclusive of Amanda Todd based on YouTube view counts. Because of the YouTube algorithm that makes the most popular videos the most easily searchable and because I was able to cross-reference these videos with media articles, I am quite confident that the top ten most viewed videos in my sample are representative of the most popular videos in the genre that still are extant on YouTube. The view counts are current as of August 2014.
Bieber posted her My Secrets video about bullying to his Facebook in March 2011.\footnote{188} Videos made by Kaitlin Brand (VID-008), Jonah Mowry (VID-051), and Kaelyn Mooningham (VID-043) received media attention because of a tangential relationship to the It Gets Better Project. Videos posted by Ben Breedlove\footnote{189} (VID-034) and Olivia Penepraze (VID-077) received media attention after they died. The last of these seven videographers who received media attention is Zoe Royer, whose video does not number among the top ten most viewed videos. Zoe was mentioned in the media because her

\footnote{188} Nadine Cheung, “Justin Beiber Posts Video of Teen Cutter on Facebook,” 
_Cambio for Girls_ (blog), March 14, 2011, [http://www.cambio.com/2011/03/14/justin-bieber-posts-video-of-teen-cutter-on-facebook/](http://www.cambio.com/2011/03/14/justin-bieber-posts-video-of-teen-cutter-on-facebook/). Jade initially posted her video to her Tumblr, not to YouTube. After her video was posted by Justin Beiber, Jade removed the video and deleted all of her social media accounts. However, videos that have been reblogged on Tumblr cannot be removed by deleting the original so Jade’s video stayed on the internet. As I was researching to find out if any other young people had killed themselves after making a My Secrets video, I found numerous versions of Jade’s video with prefaces claiming that she had killed herself. People conflated her story with another Jade, Jade Hughes, who committed suicide in 2003. Her video was also the first My Secrets to be translated into French and there are hundreds of My Secrets videos in French dedicated to Jade. A French video “Jade est-elle vivant?” still insists that she is dead. In October 2014 she has returned to twitter as @JadeWasylenko15, explaining that she is still alive and the story of her death was a hoax.

\footnote{189} Ben Breedlove, a popular YouTube celebrity, died of congenital heart failure a few days after making his My Secrets video, in December 2011.
father killed her mother in a murder/suicide. Her video was never featured in any media reports.

There are surprising links between three of the videos in the top ten and the It Gets Better Project. Kaitlin Brand’s video, titled “My Secrets Video,” has just over 800,000 views. Her video received media attention in mid-November 2011 after it was mistaken for an It Gets Better video. In some ways this is an understandable mistake. Her video is a suicide prevention video and like many in the My Secrets Genre she ends her video: “Life gets better. I promise.” In this video, she discusses the suicide of her mother, who she says is now her guardian angel. She talks about the importance of having a positive outlook on life and how she has kept smiling in spite of the loss of her mother. One of the articles about her story claims that “Kait just made one of the most touching and inspiring ‘It Gets Better’ videos imaginable.” It is interesting that Kaitlin’s video has been treated as one of the most moving videos in the It Gets Better genre since her video does not feature any LGBTQ content. Her video does however contain many of the survivorship tropes of It Gets Better discussed in the previous chapter. The discourses of optimism, overcoming hardship, and individual positive psychology could explain her video’s appeal.

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190 Gorgan, “Teenager Kait.”


192 Gorgan, “Teenager Kait.”
A week after Kaitlin posted her video, thirteen-year old Jonah Mowry turned his My Secrets video setting from private to public. According to his YouTube video description, he did this after friends of his suggested that he should make the video he had posted privately in August 2011 public. In his tear-filled video, Jonah holds up index cards that tell the audience he is terrified to go back to school because of the harassment he faces there. He explains that even though he is exhausted by ongoing harassment, he is not going to kill himself because he has “a million reasons to be here.”

At just over ten million views, his is the number one most viewed video in my sample. Perez Hilton posted Jonah’s video on Twitter, and the video went viral with one million views in the first four days. Multiple celebrities commented on his story, including Dan Savage, Lady Gaga, Rosie O’Donnell, Ricky Martin, Zooey Deschanel, Nick Jonas, Paula Abdul, Amanda Bines, and Kim Kardashian. Jonah was also interviewed internationally, including being featured on Good Morning America and in


Hilton said that the reason he promoted Jonah’s video was because Jonah exemplified the It Gets Better message gay advocates are trying to promote and his “optimism in the face of adversity [was] so inspiring.” The reception of Jonah’s video reflects the pressures and rewards of framing a personal story in optimistic terms.

Only one video in the top ten features a story about sexual abuse and family violence in addition to bullying. This video also has surprising links to the It Gets Better Project. In VID-043, the narrator, Kaelynn, is an orphan from a working-class background whose stepfather physically assaulted both Kaelynn and her mother, and sexually assaulted Kaelynn after her mother’s death. Kaelynn developed Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a severe stutter, and a fear of people because of the abuse. She was tormented at school because of her stutter; she tells her viewers:

They called me meth head, worthless, orphan, a mistake, a freak, retard and faker. I was bullied for seven years. No one stood up for me….I was hated for being myself and I started to hate me.

This is a common story for My Secrets, but Kaelynn’s video is not of the sort that usually garners much attention. The reason this video was not lost in the sea of other videos about sexual and domestic violence seems to be that, as she reveals in her video, she was


best friends with Jacob Rogers—a self-identified gay boy from Tennessee who committed suicide in 2011. Kaelynn gave compelling interviews about Jacob Roger’s death, and was featured on television news and in the Huffington Post. In her interviews, she explains that her friend had to drop out of school because of the violent harassment he faced, that the school knew about the harassment and did nothing to intervene, and that his family was too poor to have a funeral. Jacob’s case received significant media attention after the founder of It Gets Better, Dan Savage, heard Kaelynn’s interview and spearheaded a fundraiser for Jacob’s funeral. Kaelyn made her video telling her story after giving her interviews regarding Jacob’s case, and she also tagged her video with his name. At two million views, her video view count is significantly behind the top two: Jonah and Ben have ten and eight million views respectively.


3.3 Questions about Authenticity and Cultural Legibility in My Secrets

The My Secrets genre raises questions about authenticity, as do all forms of memoir, autobiography, and autoethnography. How do we know that what the videographers say is true? Is the truth of trauma contained in the details? Does leaving out particular details make the story a lie? After several million YouTube views and weeks of media attention for Jonah’s tear-filled video, he released a smiling video in which he tells the world “Everyone in my school loves me!”199. Then came the questions.

Was it all a lie? How could a boy who looked so sad also look happy? Articles filled the Internet with headlines such as “ Jonah Mowry: Fake Tears lead to YouTube Fame?” and “Real or Fake? The TRUTH About Jonah Mowry’s Video!”


Figure 8 - VID-051 “Jonah Mowry: What’s goin on..”

Jonah made a public statement on Twitter apologizing\textsuperscript{203} for the tone of his happy video, and explaining that he made it because he felt such relief to be out as gay and be accepted. He is not the only My Secrets narrator to be doubted. In early 2011, Jade (VID-122) told the audience she was extremely bullied.\textsuperscript{204} Later, classmates of Jade’s posted on Tumblr claiming that Jade was the bully and that her story was untrue.\textsuperscript{205} The comments on Zoe Royer’s YouTube video routinely call her a liar. The Internet is also filled with Amanda Todd critics.\textsuperscript{206} Amanda’s story cannot be true, they say, because there are several distinct and easily Googleable pictures of Amanda in various states of undress, and thus, they claim, she did not only show her breasts online one time as she says in her video. If she elided this detail then her entire account cannot be trusted.

These questions of authenticity are, according to Leigh Gilmore, part and parcel of the autobiographical genre and its Enlightenment roots, which demand a an objective and reflective self who is able to give a legalistic account of the truth and nothing but the truth. This notion that it is possible to give an objective accounting of oneself is one of

\textsuperscript{203} His Tweet said: “To everyone who thinks I’m lying I admit I was douchy in my follow up video. And I am sorry. I was excited. I’m still a kid. But I didn’t lie.” Jonah Mowry, Twitter post, December 6, 2011, 12:59 p.m., http://twitter.com/JonahMowryReal/status/144158926248751104.

\textsuperscript{204} Cheung, “Justin Bieber Posts Video.”


\textsuperscript{206} Many of these are chronicled in Paula Todd’s book Extreme Mean.
the cornerstones of disciplinary power. Foucault writes that confessions are the “most highly valued techniques for producing truth,” central to education, psychology, and the law. Testimonial confessions, he argues, are not neutral, spontaneous expressions of truth, but rather constructed accounts that are the essential mechanism by which Western subjects come to understand themselves and become subjected to power. One does not just confess; one confesses to someone, whose presence whether real or virtual intervenes and judges the truth and worth of the claims. Telling one’s story must already contain conventions about how to tell one’s story and to whom.

Trauma poses a problem for the bio-politics of self-representation. One of the key elements of trauma, Cathy Caruth explains, is the difficulty of articulating it given the ways in which traumatic experiences alter people and their memories. Trauma, she argues, is an incomprehensible event that is not integrated into memory as a cohesive narrative but which often manifests as intrusive repetitive thoughts and nightmares. Integrating trauma into the narrative structure required to make a story understandable to oneself and others “may lose both the precision and force that characterizes traumatic recall.” The process of telling the story changes it. It can involve elisions, both in the leaving out or forgetting of details and in the essential incomprehensibility of the event. There is a truth of trauma, she argues, that cannot be arrived at by a dutiful repetition of the facts.


Victims of trauma are routinely doubted, especially if their accounts do not match perfectly with verifiable details. In any autobiographical account, Gilmore explains,

…the self is not only responsible but always potentially culpable, given autobiography’s rhetorical proximity to testimony and the quasi-legalistic framework for judging its authenticity and authority that is so easily mobilized. Where there is getting it right, there is also getting it wrong and a litany of skepticism and censure…

Autobiography is also tied up with the gender politics of the “representative man.” Traditionally an autobiography needs a narrator that can stand as representative of human experience in some way. The self in the autobiography acts like a mirror to the reader’s self: “…in my identification with you I substitute myself for you, the other. If I am barred from doing that by your unrepresentativeness, I withdraw my identification and quite likely the sympathy that flows from it.”

In our culture, Gilmore explains, sympathy usually flows to those accused of abuse rather than their victims because it’s easier to put yourself in the shoes of someone, usually a middle-class man, who we imagine to be falsely accused than someone who is a genuine victim. The story of a victim, especially one from a marginalized demographic, demonstrates the conflict between personal experience and the representative man. In order, therefore, to be representative, you must follow as closely as possible the narrative scripts that are most recognizable.


210 Ibid., 22.

211 Ibid., 23.
Culturally recognizable scripts themselves can be double-edged swords with the possibility for reproducing violence but also for producing agency and resistance. It is important to be clear that just because the narrators of My Secrets are relying on and sometimes reproducing cultural scripts does not mean that they are passive, lacking agency or inauthentic. In fact, according to Wendy Hesford, the expectation of a particular authentic realism in trauma disclosures in itself a cultural script that is rigidly gendered. Women are often coded as naturally passive victims, for example. Survivor narratives around violence often ignore systemic causes of violence and “further individualize violence and trauma and in so doing prompt passive empathy or judgment from viewers rather than a state of critical witnessing.”212 However, at the same time, narrators of trauma often resist dominant narratives as they reproduce them. Hesford explains that scripts are not something that individuals take up passively but rather are something that people actively negotiate. She argues that we should reconfigure our ideas of “personal and political agency as embodied negotiations and material enactments of cultural scripts and ideologies.”213 There is no way to get outside of culture to some more authentic truth, but sometimes there are gaps between the script and the lived reality that offer pockets of resistant possibility.

The challenge for the My Secrets videographers is to represent their stories in ways that mobilize sympathy and minimize criticism. The narrators are grappling with


213 Ibid.
conflicting cultural pressures; on the one hand, there is this long standing cultural
tradition which says that the only way to heal is to articulate to a sympathetic ear the truth
of what happened, but on the other hand trauma is seen as something that is inarticulable.
Thus survivors face, in Gilmore’s words, “an impossible injunction to tell what
cannot…be spoken.”\textsuperscript{214} Foucault argues that the cultural pressure to tell one’s story is so
normalized that it now presents itself as freeing rather than subjectifying. Telling one’s
story might be freeing and healing but at the same time it opens people up to the
possibility of more criticism and blame. Additionally (as we have seen), young people,
especially girls, are told never to talk to strangers, especially online. My Secrets
videographers push against this cultural norm by disclosing their story to strangers rather
than friends or family, and frequently by disclosing to strangers the dangers they face
\textit{from} friends and family. In doing so, they resist the stranger danger discourse.

Negotiating all of these contradictory expectations may account for the
conventions of the My Secrets genre. To begin with, the videographers do not speak. It
would be difficult to fulfill all the cultural expectations of trauma victims while narrating
a cohesive story. As Hesford points out, the conventions of realism often require tears to
create emotional credibility for the victim but then, as a consequence, the speech of
female victims is coded as hysterical. The silence of the videographer permits control of
narrative. She can show emotion without changing the tone of her voice. By writing out
her story in advance, she can remember to include all the salient details which the
conventions of realism require. At the same time, the written cards themselves can stand

\textsuperscript{214} Gilmore, \textit{Limits} 7.
in for the unspeakable nature of what has happened to these narrators. The music which accompanies these silent stories sets a tone which invites sympathy. Sad music can invoke feelings of emotional communion, “sharing the sadness of another human being,” and musically induced empathy. All of these things together help to move the flow of sympathy back towards the victim rather than the perpetrator.

The narrators of My Secrets are not just telling their stories for personal healing and individual catharsis. They recognize that they are not the only ones going through trauma, and are actively seeking to help others. Here they also face complex negotiations with culturally dominant scripts. The narrators are working for change at a time when, according to Angela McRobbie, neoliberal discourses are stripping girls of the language necessary to understand their experiences of gendered subjugation as systemic and thus reawaken a group political consciousness that would combat this subjugation on a large scale. Under neoliberalism, cultural conventions include an understanding of personal problems as stemming from individual failures rather than from systemic causes. According to McRobbie, the state, media, and pop culture work in concert to employ “a

215: e.g. Jonah’s video and other videos in my sample use the song “Breathe Me” by Sia with the lyrics: “Help, I’ve done it again/ I have been here many times before/ Hurt myself again today/and the worst part is there is no one to blame/ be my friend/hold me/wrap me up./ I am small and needy/warm me up and breathe me.”

wide range of hyper-individualizing strategies and technologies of the self”\textsuperscript{217} against middle-class girls in order to render their experiences of collective oppression illegible in those terms. Pressure to confess individual pain online are part of this continuum of regulatory apparatuses and

“…in the time of blogs and websites like MySpace and YouTube…[it becomes difficult] to differentiate between what appears to be female agency in the many opportunities of self-advertisement of pain anxiety and self-loathing, and those institutional mechanism which are being pre-emptively deployed across the commercial media which produce the framing for institutionalization of melancholia.”\textsuperscript{218}

As discussed in the previous chapter, McRobbie argues that young women’s anger is culturally coded as an illegible rage that becomes understood as constitutive to what it means to belong to the category of “girl.” Girls are considered to be in pain because they have the psychic make up of the modern girl, and not for any external reasons.

At the same time, McRobbie says that some confessions can be read as “nascent political texts,”\textsuperscript{219} meaning texts that make a social statement without awareness of political language. Melancholia drives people to focus only on their own individual suffering, but texts such as suicide notes shift the focus away from individual pain and back towards an acknowledgement of social circumstances, damaging social norms, and practices. Amanda’s videos and the My Secrets videos as a genre can be read as nascent political texts. The narrators are trying to raise awareness amongst their viewers. Some

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{217} McRobbie, \textit{Aftermath}, 119.
\item \textsuperscript{218} Ibid., 116.
\item \textsuperscript{219} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
do this actively by asking the audience to change; for example, in VID-087 the narrator asks the audience to stop victim blaming and support survivors. Some do this simply by letting the viewer know they are not alone. The assumed audience for the My Secrets genre is another person in pain whose life could be saved by knowing they are not the only ones. According to Carol Todd, Amanda explicitly made her video “to get her message out there and have it used as a learning tool for others….she wanted to save 1000 more [young people].” At the time when McRobbie was writing The Aftermath of Feminism, she said it remained to be seen if activists and parents could use nascent political texts, such as suicide notes, as political objects to demand social change. Amanda’s video has demonstrated both the potential political power of these texts as well as their messiness. In order for stories to be heard, they need to employ individualizing survivor tropes, and this, as we have seen with Jonah’s and Amanda’s videos, can be used by media and government to reinforce neoliberal discourse. However, My Secrets is also a space of active negotiations with cultural scripts that reveal the gap between the materiality of the collective suffering of videographers and the individualizing narratives of the broader culture. Regardless of the truthfulness of details of individual stories, together they stand as collective trauma-based testimony—with all the problems and opportunities that testimony brings.

3.4 Questions of Illegibility

The same techniques of power that make some confessions legible can render others invisible. Spivak, for example, argues that the colonizing histories of Western knowledge-production render the testimony of those already marginalized by a discourse of subalterity illegible to knowledge-producers. Their stories are used in instrumental ways in service to hegemonic power, but are not read or heard on their own terms. In her critique of thinkers like Foucault, Spivak cautions against hegemonic universalization of discourses of knowledge-production that do not take into account the dangers of
“appropriating the other by assimilation.”

While her critique of Foucault centres on the context of women in the geopolitical South, there are also parallels in the Western context. Kimberle Crenshaw argues that stories of violence against white women are politically mobilized by white politicians, activists, and media personalities in ways that humanize the victims, whereas stories of women of colour are often framed in ways that objectify the victims, focused on their battered bodies and presenting them in service of universalizing discourses of violence against women. Women who are “othered”

...are silenced as much by being relegated to the margins of experience as by total exclusion. Tokenizing, objectifying, voyeuristic inclusion is at least as disempowering as total exclusion. The effort to politicize violence against women will do little to address Black and other minority women if their images are retained simply to magnify the problem rather than to humanize their experiences. 222

Butler argues that humanization and dehumanization extend into the politics of grief and grieving. Public expressions of grief are one of the ways that populations mobilize political alliances, make demands for change, and come to understand themselves. Public grief by means of obituaries and media articles mark some lives as worthy and important, icons “for national self-recognition,” while others are “unmarkable and ungrievable.” 223 Not all stories of death, suicide, or suffering are raised discursively


222 Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins,” 1261.

223 Judith Butler, Precarious Life (New York: Verso, 2006), 34-35. It is important to note that Butler’s critique of grievability centres on the West. She argues that Palestinian lives become
to the level of “cultural trauma,” understood by Nicolas Demertzis to involve a “realization of a common plight” that is considered by the majority of a society to be so significant as to “change established roles, norms and narratives.” As Demertzis puts it,

…trauma always poses the question: for whom? This is so because the inequality of economic, symbolic, social and political capital influences—if not determines altogether—the vulnerability of the particular social group facing the traumatizing circumstances.

There is no public act of grief for people whose lives are considered as Other, with lives that are considered less than fully human within dominant discourse.

Consider how the politics of attention and grievability are at work in Amanda Todd’s story. In response to criticism by Vancouver School Board chair Patti Bacchus about how Amanda’s case was reported, Tristin Hopper of the National Post explained...
that the media does not usually report on suicides in order to “avoid spawning the well-documented phenomenon of ‘suicide contagion,’” but that “high-profile, legislation-spurring suicides such as Amanda Todd’s... simply cannot be ignored.”

During the same week as Amanda’s suicide, a suicide pact of thirty Aboriginal youth ranging in age from twelve to fifteen from the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver was interrupted. Vancouver police said they knew about the pact in September, but in order to avoid spurring copy-cat cases it was not reported until November, when it was brought to the media’s attention by frontline advocates. After reports of the pact emerged, Bacchus told parents not to panic, that the story of the suicide pact was overblown: it was really only six or seven children at most who were “truly” suicidal. While Amanda Todd’s story has fueled multiple proposed pieces of legislation and various plans for anti-bullying interventions, a newspaper article from January 2014 explains that the conditions for youth in the Downtown Eastside have worsened.

In another area of concern over the past few months, front-line workers, youths and parents are making allegations of increasing “police brutality” in the neighbourhood... Some youth have

227 Hopper, “Year in Ideas.”


reported being punched in the face while handcuffed, and outreach workers allegedly have witnessed several incidents.\textsuperscript{230}

Some cases simply cannot be ignored; others, it seems, can. The kinds of trauma that can be ignored are systemic and ongoing, like poverty and racial inequality, rather than individual middle-class youth suicides. In the words of Elizabeth Povinelli, the ignorable situations are “ordinary, chronic and cruddy rather than catastrophic, crisis laden, and sublime.”\textsuperscript{231}

3.5 “Ordinary, Chronic and Cruddy, Rather than Crisis Laden and Sublime”:

**Domestic Violence in My Secrets**

Domestic violence features prominently in My Secrets. Within my sample, thirty-four of the 162 videos contained disclosures of domestic violence. Fifteen videographers (all of them female) survived intimate partner violence as a teenager or adult. Twenty-one were the victims of physical child abuse. Sixteen videographers were molested by family members, and ten were molested by someone connected to their family. Seven videographers disclosed domestic violence against someone close to them, including the three murders discussed. Two videographers who were abused as children also experienced subsequent intimate partner violence.

Three women in my sample disclosed having lost family members to murder. In VID-052, the narrator, an eighteen-year-old Latina woman, tells viewers that she was molested

\textsuperscript{230} Sam Cooper, “‘People Aren’t Listening’: East Van Aboriginal Teens Saved from a Suicide Pact Almost a Year Ago Still Living Directly in Harm’s Way,” *Province*, January 5, 2014, archived at http://www.canada.com/story.html?id=100f5e8b-e8a3-4430-9738-8d667a35d575.

\textsuperscript{231} Povinelli, *Economies of Abandonment*, 3.
at thirteen by her mother’s boyfriend. When she told her mother what was going on, her mother kicked the man out of the house but continued to see him occasionally. Her mother’s boyfriend murdered her mother while she slept in her own apartment in 2006. In VID-058, a Latina woman recounts that her cousin was murdered by her husband in front of her children. She uses the video to ask viewers to help locate the murderer, who is still at large, and provides links to the police tip line. “I’m not looking for sympathy,” she says, “I’m looking for Justice.”

Domestic violence is often framed as an isolated problem in a nuclear family, with no examination of how one instance of family violence spills out and affects multiple people. In VID-136 the narrator, a black mother, tells the audience:

My biological father went to prison for beating up his stepdaughter. I went to high school with her and thought everyone knew. Why are children burdened with other people’s shame?

In addition to experiences of intimate partner violence, two teenage videographers talk about their experiences of being stalked by boyfriends post-separation. The video description for VID-028 reads:

This is my story. I had a hard time filming this, forgive any mistakes, but I thought it was important for people to be aware of this issue. In the US, there are 503,485 women stalked by an intimate partner each year. The majority of these cases go unreported, and a significant amount end in domestic violence/murder. I want to speak up, and maybe my story can inspire women who live in fear.

In her video she talks about meeting a young man who seemed funny and kind and quickly became her best friend in whom she could confide. She loved him. Over time, he became controlling and frightening and began to threaten her. He was popular, good
looking, and well-liked at school and so no one saw or acknowledged that there was a problem. He also secretly used various hard drugs: meth, heroine, and cocaine. He would follow her and watch her for hours. “I couldn’t escape,” she reports. “I started shaking any time I saw him.” After they broke up, this continued and her mother drove her to the police station. “Imagine,” she relates, “having to turn in your best friend for stalking you!”

In VID-035, the narrator tells of her violent relationship in grade eight. She is one of the few narrators who do not show their faces. She explains,

This isn’t just another one of those stories. I’m not feeling sorry for myself. I’m trying to help girls that were in the same situation I was in. My face and who I am are not relevant to this video. I just want to tell my story.

Her relationship started out well, but a few months into it she noticed her boyfriend was significantly “more jealous than normal.” He swore at the other boys she knew and threatened them if they came near her. He forbade her from having male friends and created more and more elaborate “rules” for her to follow, including choosing what she was to wear to school and not allowing her to spend time with any friends or even walk in the park.

At this point, I was scared! I should have left. Many people ask me why didn’t I? He threatened to hurt me, my family and then himself if I left.

He forced her to have unwanted sex, spit on her, slapped her, and shoved her. He told her that her mother, who had committed suicide when she was in grade school, “had killed herself so she didn’t have to deal with you anymore.” She met a new friend (the friend’s gender is not specified) who told her that they would protect her and it was ok for her to
break up with him. The first day she had over 150 missed calls. After this he texted her seventy times a day for almost a year. She reaches out in her video, saying, “It’s a lot more complicated than you think. GIRLS. You are not alone! You don’t have to do this.”

Intimate partner violence among teenagers is often treated as different from domestic violence; however, both of these girls tell a story that is fairly typical of abuse dynamics, and these narrators are aware of and express this to their audience.

As outlined in the previous chapter, 71 out of the 162 videos reach out to the audience to tell viewers they are not alone in their experiences of violence and harassment. Seventeen include a specific call to action asking viewers, for example, to challenge sexism or homophobia. Eleven videographers in my sample offered some kind of explicit awareness of the systemics of abuse. Rather than nascent political texts, these eleven can be read as overt political texts in their own right. These videographers use statistics and situate themselves within a larger context. Their systemic analysis is informed by the dominant discourses around violence. There is an interesting tension here. It is important to acknowledge the videographers’ agency and how they resist discourses that deny their experiences and tell them to be silent. At the same time, as Hestford explains about resistant texts, a “victim’s claim to agency is defined by the culturally gendered scripts available to her and those deemed socially appropriate.”

The narrators sometimes end up reproducing some dominant discourses as they resist others.

3.6 Similarities Between Discourses of “Battered Women” and “Bullied Children”

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232 Hesford, “Reading Rape Stories,” 201.
The social imaginary has difficulty coming to terms with how violence is endemic to nuclear families, neighbourhoods, and nations. The violent husband, as Ahmed points out, is seen as a monster, a stranger in disguise. The woman who lives with him, therefore, did not do her duty to stay on guard against the dangerous stranger. A “battered woman” I argue, is discursively understood as one who first fails to recognize the stranger/husband for the monster that he is and who then refuses to leave him once his monster nature becomes evident. In this story, she is fundamentally mistaken in her understanding of what it means to be a woman, a wife, a mother, a neighbour, and a citizen. The “battered woman” cannot speak for herself; rather she needs to be spoken for and about. This story continues to shape North American cultural imagination(s) around ideal victimhood.

Lisa Goodman and Deborah Epstein explain that the shelter system originally was staffed by other women who had experienced partner violence and who focused their counseling efforts on helping to solve practical and institutional barriers such as poor law enforcement, lack of access to child care, lack of housing, and low welfare rates. Grassroots movements sprung up where survivors helped survivors, but they needed funding. Thus, activists trying to gain government support made a strategic decision to fight a deeply entrenched class myth: that domestic violence was primarily perpetrated by poor men, who were seen as excessively violent by nature. Advocates knew this misconception had contributed to policymakers’ lack of interest in partner abuse.

233 Ahmed, Strange Encounters, 36.
234 Goodman and Epstein, Listening to Battered Women, 35.
As long as it was a “minority problem,” it would not be dealt with, for it was considered a problem endemic to strangers. Anti-violence campaigns started featuring images of beautiful white women with bruises, and focusing on middle-class white women who said again and again that they were “not supposed to be a battered wife.”

This reaffirmed their position as legitimate members of the community who needed to be protected, and contrasted them with pre-conceived notions about the identity of victims. This narrative constructed the battered woman as necessarily white and middle-class. Despite the fact that the lobby claims to speak for all women,

the strength of the appeal to protect “our women” must be its race and class specificity. After all, it has always been someone’s mother, wife, daughter, or sister who has been abused, even when the violence was stereotypically Black or Brown and poor.

With government funding from an increasingly neoliberal government came an influx of accredited mental health professionals who took over counseling services in shelters. These professionals

were trained to emphasize an internal, individual, psychological conception of intimate partner violence rather than an external, political one… their focus on mental health over practical assistance and social change had an unintended but profound impact on the movement: It cast battered women as clients with psychological difficulties rather than as victims of social oppression.

Rather than concrete help, counseling offered to women who have experienced violence now focuses on the ways in which the woman is failing to protect herself.

\[235\] Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins,” 1258.

\[236\] Ibid., 1260.

\[237\] Goodman and Epstein, Listening to Battered Women, 49-50.
Similarly, the judicial system offers few protections, blaming and silencing women who are experiencing ongoing violence while ignoring the ways in which the system is in some cases exacerbating the problem—for example, through mandatory joint custody laws that put women and kids at risk. These women complain that they are facing real external problems, compounded by institutional barriers, and are not heard. Margaret Little explains that experiences of violence are tied up with issues of poverty, saying that

most women experience violence…poor women experience twice as much violence. Another study reveals that Aboriginal women’s rate of spousal homicide is eight times higher than for non-Aboriginal women. 238

There is a very similar discursive problem for children who are being tormented and experiencing violence on an ongoing basis. They also find themselves outside of protection. “I always say how bullied I am, but no one listens…What do I have to do so people will listen to me?” wrote Jamey Rodemeyer on his Tumblr.239 In an article about Jacob Rogers published in the Huffington Post, we learn that “Kaelynn says her friend repeatedly sought help from the school’s guidance office” which did nothing to help, and,


she explained, after the school got a new principal and counseling staff, “it was worse, and they ignored him.”

Schools have generally adopted an individual psychological model to deal with bullying that is remarkably similar in its discursive content to battered women’s counseling. The problem is treated as less about the actual violence and more about the young person’s internal reaction to the bullying. The social dynamics of bullying have historically been the purview of psychologists and social workers. Being the victim of bullying is associated, throughout the psychological literature, with particular personal characteristics that cause a person’s victimization, including being:

- quiet, cautious, anxious, insecure…and lacking sufficient self esteem to stand up for themselves. This unwillingness to disclose their victimization may act as a signal for bullies.

Parents of victimized children are also blamed for being overprotective and causing their children’s low self esteem. The cycle of bullying is considered to be due to “an intergenerational cycle of overprotection.” The idea that people who experience violence are in need of counseling is reinforced in research, pedagogy, and media reports.


242 Ibid., 105.
The solution to bullying, according to this approach, is to teach children how to “stand up to bullies, how to get adult help, and how to reach out in friendship to students who may be involved in a bullying situation.”243 All of this is assuming that help is real, present, and effective. The aunt of ten-year-old Ashlynn Conner, who committed suicide in 2011 after experiences with gendered bullying, explains the steps she told her niece to follow: “The first thing is the child is to tell the kids ‘no’; the second one is they are to walk away, and the third one is to tell the teacher. Ashlynn did all three of those things.”244 Teaching bystanders to intervene is also a popular model. These theoretical behavioral models often imagine a single bully and a number of bystanders. These models do not, however, account for cases where an entire school is harassing someone in person and online. The individualizing neoliberal discourses surrounding these two phenomena are similar. My Secrets narrators have shown that the actual phenomena intersect, overlap, and are part of a larger continuum of systemic violence.

3.7 Revisiting the Problem of Cyberbullying: Kimberle Proctor

Kimberle Proctor’s case helps to illuminate the interconnected relationship between multiple kinds of violence that stranger danger discourse usually obscures. Kimberle’s family was one of the four families (including Amanda Todd’s) who were invited to meet with Stephen Harper about the dangers of cyberbullying.245 In an

243 Ibid., 106.

244 Inbar, “Mom: Bullying Drove My 10-year-old Girl to Suicide.”

interview about the meeting, Kimberle’s aunt Jo-Ann Landolt told CTV news that society must “do more to warn students about the dangers of dealing with strangers online.”

What is remarkable about this is that Kimberle was raped and murdered by two men she knew very well: her ex-boyfriend and his best friend. These men dumped Kimberle’s body under a bridge only four kilometers from the bridge where Reena Virk, a South Asian teenager, was drowned by peers in 1997. Lee and Chatterjee have pointed out that Kimberle was also bi-racial, and this fact has been largely ignored in media coverage. Even more remarkable is that Kimberle’s murderer’s father was himself a murderer who had raped and killed Cherish Oppenheim, an Aboriginal girl from Merritt, British Columbia in 2001. Prior to murdering Cherish, this man was also

246 Ibid.


248 This may have also contributed to her killers saying Kimberle seemed “an easy target.” (quoted in Hutchison).


violent to his wife and other women. Numerous articles were written about Kimberle’s murder, including a *Vanity Fair* exposé called “Murder by Text,” but I could find little in the media about Cherish’s murder. Relevant here is Smith’s insight that some bodies, such as those of Aboriginal women, are classed as inherently “rapable”:

> Because Indian bodies are “dirty” they are considered sexually violable and “rapable” and the rape of bodies that are considered inherently impure or dirty simply does not count.

It is also of note that while Kimberle’s family was invited to speak to the Prime Minister, Cherish is treated as simply one of the names on a long list of murdered and missing women given to Prime Minister Harper—a list that he says does not warrant an inquiry.

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While there are pages of media articles devoted to Kimberle’s personality and cell
phone usage\(^{256}\) as well as her murderers’ Internet chats, video game preferences, and
pennants for pornography,\(^{257}\) not one article mentioned the prevalence of intimate
partner violence and intimate partner murders among young people. The previous
assaults, domestic violence against family members,\(^{258}\) restraining orders,\(^{259}\) accusations
of sexual assault, and abuse of animals\(^{260}\) collectively accumulated by the two boys\(^{261}\)
received low coverage. Rather than frame this as a case of post-separation intimate
partner abuse, the media chose to portray it as an example of the dangers of

\(^{255}\) “Harper Rebuffs New Calls for Murdered, Missing Women Inquiry,” \textit{CBC News}, August 21,
missing-women-inquiry-1.2742845.

\(^{256}\) In Kushner, “Murder By Text,” the focus is on personality traits that made Kim vulnerable:
“easily hurt by insults and just as easily swayed by compliments, she dwelled in an angsty
purgatory familiar to most adolescents.” It said she had a history of being bullied, that she had
attention deficit disorder and that “Kim’s earnestness made her vulnerable.”

\(^{257}\) Ibid.

\(^{258}\) Derosa, “Father of Proctor Killer.”

\(^{259}\) “Proctor’s Teen Killer Clashed with Mother,” \textit{CBC}.

\(^{260}\) “Killer Teens Never Got the Help They Needed,” \textit{Vancouver Sun}, April 9, 2011, archived at

\(^{261}\) “Everyone Missed Warning Signs Prior to Gruesome Murder,” \textit{Vancouver Sun}, April 6, 2011,
archived at http://www.canada.com/story_print.html?id=a3ffa9e7-cb45-4b54-a901-
dbfdb48ec1f0.
technology, with *Vanity Fair* exclaiming “the text breakup from Kim sent Kruse over the edge.”

In Canada in 2011, the year this article was published in *Vanity Fair*, the “rate of intimate partner homicides committed against females increased by 19%—the third increase in four years.” According to Statistics Canada, while domestic violence in married relationships has gone down, rates of “other intimate relationship homicides have doubled since 2003.” Young women are more at risk. “The rates of violent crime against women aged 15 to 24 is 42% higher than rates for women aged 25 to 34, and nearly double the rates for women aged 35 to 44” and “women aged 15 to 24 are killed at nearly three times the rate for all female victims of domestic homicide.”

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262 *Vanity Fair* argued that social media was responsible because people are more likely to open up online. “Online, [Kim and her boyfriend] began sharing the insecurities that they couldn’t in person.” The article also focused on the digital, for example: “today’s teenagers have found a more clandestine spot: a digital basement” and claimed this was a case of a “teenage nightmare that British Columbia police uncovered when they peeked behind…digital curtains.” Kushner, “Murder by Text.”

263 Ibid.

264 “...while the rate for male victims declined by almost half. The rate for male victims of intimate partner homicide (0.08 per 100,000 males) was the lowest recorded since data collection began in 1961.” Samuel Perrault, *Homicide in Canada, 2011* (Canada: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, December 4, 2012), 11.

The *Vanity Fair* article acknowledges that Kimberle knew her attackers. Yet in Canadian news articles about the meeting with Harper, the focus of Kimberle’s story was on dangerous strangers. Reducing Kimberle’s rape and murder to an instance of stranger danger illustrates Ahmed’s point that “reduction of danger to the stranger conceals the danger that may be embedded in the familiar... the rapist as a stranger conceals how most sexual attacks are committed by friends and family.” Ahmed further observes that the violent husband is read as a monster underneath, as a stranger passing as husband, rather than as husband exercising the power that is already legitimated through hegemonic forms of masculinity.

Like the violent husband, online cyberbullies are also seen as individual monsters. Whitney Phillips’ work on troll culture argues that trolls—a term which in her work refers to a community of people, mostly white men between fifteen and thirty-five, who identify as “trolls” and work together to purposefully disrupt and disturb people online—behave in ways that are extensions of cultural norms rather than in direct opposition to them. Trolls display a hegemonic masculine bravado and seek to win arguments in ways

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267 Kushner, “Murder by Text.”


269 Ibid.

that are extensions of culturally sanctioned masculine gender norms. Trolls benefit from shocking and disturbing people just like mainstream media benefits from the traffic they get from tragedy and outrage. Trolls, Phillips points out, often work in a symbiotic relationship with the “media outrage machine,” each reporting on the behavior of the other. The people she studies—“RIP trolls,” who sabotage the memorial pages of suicide victims on Facebook—are not lone unhappy souls or lurking monsters. Rather they are part of a dominant group (young middle-class white males) and form communities both online and offline. Phillips argues that studying trolling illuminates otherwise hidden social norms and disrupts binary ideas about normal and abnormal, social and anti-social. Similarly, I maintain that behaviors demarcated as “bullying” inform us about socially-sanctioned norms, which are ubiquitous in a way that blurs the accepted binary between online and offline dangers and behaviours.

3.8 “Crimes” Rather than a “Sociological Phenomenon”?  

Andrea Smith argues that the individualizing discourses found within the battered women’s movement—and that I argue are present in the popular bullying and cyberbullying discourse—represent a co-option of anti-violence activism by the state. Financial grants are accompanied by various stipulations. According to Smith, the government decided “the problem is that survivors are victims; they are ill and need professional therapy from somebody with an MSW or a PhD,” and any activist work

must be done in conjunction with the state and the police.\textsuperscript{272} Critiques of the prison industrial complex were thus foreclosed as a possibility for battered women’s shelters. In “Captured By the State: The Antiviolence Movement and the Non-Profit Industrial Complex,” Smith says,

When we talk about making violence against women a crime, we think about the word crime, what are we to do with the fact that in the United States genocide has never been a crime. In fact, genocide has often been the law itself… And when we therefore try to address issues of gender and racial injustice through the state, we are then not able to look at how the state is itself

\textsuperscript{272} Andrea Smith, “Captured by the State: The Antiviolence Movement and the Non-profit Industrial Complex,” presented at the 9th Annual Critical Race and Anti-Colonial Studies Conference, Concordia and McGill Universities, Montreal, 2009, https://archive.org/details/AndreaSmithTheAntiviolenceMovementAndTheNon-profitIndustrialComplex. In addition, Emi Koyama points out that this move to professionalize the battered women’s movement means that shelters have become sites of surveillance and control for women of colour, and actively screen out “difficult clients” including people who do not speak English, sex workers, trans* people, and people with substance abuse problems. Information shared in mandatory support groups and parenting classes are often used against women. She describes the shelter system as another abusive relationship which women must navigate around and protect themselves against. It is not just the state but the workers that treat the women as suspect, lacking in life skills and requiring monitoring and control. Emi Koyama, “Disloyal to Feminism: Abuse Survivors within the Domestic Violence Shelter System,” in Colour of Violence: An INCITE! Anthology, eds. Andrea Smith, Beth Richie, and Julia Sudbury (Cambridge: South End Press, 2006.)
constituted by violence, settler-colonialism, hetero-patriarchy and white supremacy.\textsuperscript{273}

This complicated issue with the word “crime” can be seen in Maggie DeVries’ book \textit{Missing Sarah: A Memoir of Loss}. In this book, DeVries talks about her frustration trying to get police to help her find her sister Sarah, who was later found to have been murdered by serial killer Robert Pickton. “The police kept saying there was no indication of crimes,” writes DeVries.\textsuperscript{274} Ironically, at the same time the police told DeVries that the reason there was no indication of a serial killer was because their list of

…local men whom they considered capable of murdering many women, topped six hundred. Many of these men are living apparently “normal” lives with jobs and wives and children. They act out their violent impulses against sex workers because they can. They can drive downtown, invite a woman into their car, drive them to an isolated spot, rape her, beat her, even kill her, without consequences. In Vancouver alone, there are hundreds of such men, whose names are known to police...\textsuperscript{275}

Stephen Harper has recently explained that the reason he will not open a federal inquiry into the missing and murdered women is because the problem is best understood as crimes against innocent “persons” more generally.

Cases of missing and murdered aboriginal women should be viewed as “crimes” rather than a “sociological phenomenon,” Prime Minister Stephen Harper said...\textsuperscript{276}

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\textsuperscript{273} Smith, \textit{Captured by the State}.
\textsuperscript{274} Maggie De Vries, \textit{Missing Sarah} (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2008), 224.
\textsuperscript{275} Ibid., 220.
\textsuperscript{276} Alex Boutilier, “Native Teen’s Slaying a ‘Crime,’ Not a ‘Sociological Phenomenon,’ Stephen Harper Says,” \textit{Toronto Star}, August 21, 2014,
\end{flushright}
Thus the problem should be dealt with by the police. He has also described “cyberbullying” as “simply criminal activity.”

Angela Y Davis points out that a crime is “breaking the law,” but people do that all the time; “the question is, what determines who has to pay for those crimes? ... Race, class and gender are all facts that help determine who actually gets punished and how.”

These factors also determine who is considered a victim of crime and who is not. Viewing both violence against women and “cyberbullying” as primarily crimes to be dealt with by the police produces multiple problems. In VID-061, a girl discloses that she had her naked picture shared over the Internet by her boyfriend. She changed schools twice and things only got worse. The police told her there was “nothing they could do” and for her “to ignore it.” West Coast Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF) points out that most of the activity considered cyberbullying—such as stalking, hate speech and rape—is already illegal, but that these laws are not being enforced. Rehteah Parsons’ case is being tried only under current child pornography laws; apparently photographs of an assault, though themselves criminal, are not evidence enough that an assault occurred.

Treating violence against women as primarily a crime to be dealt with by the police can also be used against marginalized women. The Battered Women’s Support Services of


BC (BWSS) explains that “police may view Aboriginal women, immigrant women and/or women of colour as being more susceptible to using violence and therefore arrest them.”\(^{279}\) With the implementation of “gender neutral” mandatory arrest laws, they have found an increase in husbands using mandatory arrest laws against immigrant women with few English skills.

It is crucial to recognize that the police do not treat everyone equally. The surveillance and harassment by police of marginalized communities is one reason why marginalized people are reluctant to seek help from law enforcement. Pivot Legal Society has released a report\(^ {280}\) which states that more than 95% of by-law violation tickets issued in Vancouver are issued in the impoverished Downtown Eastside. Ticketing is used to run immigration checks, and check for warrants for arrest.

The effects of this policy are striking. Residents of the DTES live in constant fear of enforcement, and outstanding fines and warrants were recently cited by the final report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry as the primary reason why marginalized people, especially women, do not feel comfortable providing information or seeking assistance from police.\(^ {281}\)

The bills to deal with “cyberbullying” or “Internet crime” proposed by the federal government have been criticized for their deployment of extreme surveillance measures.


\(^ {281}\) Ibid.
It is also important to consider that government surveillance is disproportionately focused on poor and minority communities. As Krystle Maki explains, under neoliberalism, “poor people are not trusted to become self-sufficient on their own and instead need constant surveillance and discipline to become ‘good client citizens.’” Battered women’s shelters, which are funded by the state and disproportionately used by poor mothers, are becoming a site of increasing surveillance by the state. According to a report called “Walking on Eggshells,” many will leave the shelter system to go on welfare and face even more surveillance and demeaning treatment. Some women refer to their experience with welfare as another abusive relationship. The welfare system has little familiarity with abuse dynamics, and the women in the system are constantly under scrutiny and suspicion. Abusive men are able to use the poor treatment and inadequately low welfare rates to increase their power over their wives who often have no other option than to return to their abusers.

It is not just the poor who are facing increased surveillance; Aboriginal advocate Cindy Blackstock states:

284 Ibid.,
I received hundreds of pages of government documents revealing that 189 federal government officials from the departments of Justice and Aboriginal Affairs were routinely spying on my personal Facebook page.\textsuperscript{285} 

The privacy commissioner ruled that this behavior contravened the Privacy Act.\textsuperscript{286} It is worth noting that the newest iteration of anti-bullying bill C-13 would allow corporations to share information with the government without a warrant. Even Amanda Todd’s mother Carol has spoken out with concern over the new surveillance powers outlined in the bill.\textsuperscript{287} It is worth looking with at least some skepticism at the government’s claim that they are going to get tough on cybercrime, especially when politicians on both sides of the aisle agree; apparently, “Prime Minister Stephen Harper and NDP leader Tom Mulcair agree that more needs to be done to prevent cyberbullying, and policing isn’t keeping up with Internet crimes.”\textsuperscript{288} Viewing bullying as separate from violence, and cyber-bullying as an extraordinary race- and gender-neutral crime that needs to be dealt


\textsuperscript{286} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{287} “Ms. Carol Todd (As an Individual) at the Justice and Human Rights Committee.”

with by the state, makes critique of the state and of systemic violence in which the state is complicit difficult.

Amanda Todd’s story followed the individual “empowerment” trajectory that victims of violence in our society are told to adopt. She sought help from resources including teachers, parents, counselors, doctors, psychiatric institutions, and the police; she removed herself from the situation, changing schools twice and even changing cities; she spoke out about bullying in public forums; and despite all of this, she did not experience protection. Many of those young people who produce My Secrets videos describe following a similar trajectory, and most, as we have seen, are never heard. Amanda’s story, along with others in the My Secrets genre, can help to illustrate the challenges faced by so many people who are being harassed and abused, and to demonstrate the problems with the frequently invoked narrative which frames “leaving” problematic situations as the solution to violence rather than focusing on the cultures of harm that made these situations possible in the first place. An answer to “I have nobody, I need somebody” can be “you are not alone, I promise.” But this simply cannot be the only answer. A counter-public community can support you, but it cannot stop your experiences of systemic violence or the failures of the larger culture. As long as “bullying” is seen as an ordinary part of growing up, and “cyberbullying” as an extraordinary occurrence perpetrated by individual dangerous strangers, these My Secrets stories will be listened to by no one but other victims. If Amanda Todd is to have a legacy, let it be that systemic violence needs to be addressed in ways that re-centre our thinking towards anti-colonial solidarity across difference, and away from individualistic accounts and “neutral” solutions.


———. “‘Real Name’ Policies Are an Abuse of Power.”


http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2010/nov/16/wake-it-gets-better-campaign


Zambreno, Kate. Heroines. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 201
Appendix A Amanda Todd Video Transcript

Hello! I’ve decided to tell you about my never-ending story.
In 7th grade I would go with friends on webcam, meet and talk to new people.
Then got called stunning, beautiful, perfect, etc...
Then wanted me to flash...
So I did...
1 year later...
I got a message on Facebook from him... Don’t know how he knew me.
It said...
If you don’t put on a show for me I will send your boobs.
He knew my address, school, relatives, family names.
Christmas break...
Knock at my door at 4am...
It was the police... my photo was sent to everyone.
I then got really sick and got... anxiety, major depression and panic disorder.
I then moved and got into drugs + alcohol.
My anxiety got worse... couldn’t go out.
A year past and the guy came back with my new list of friends and school. But made a Facebook page
My boobs were his profile pic...
Cried every night, lost all my friends and respect people had for me... again...
Then nobody liked me, name calling, judged...
I can never get that photo back.
It’s out there forever...
I started cutting...
I promised myself never again...
Didn’t have any friends and I sat at lunch alone
so I moved schools again...
Everything was better even though I sat still alone at lunch in the library everyday.
After a month later I started talking to an old guy friend
We back and forth texted and he started to say he liked me...
Lead me on. He had a girlfriend
then he said come over my girlfriend’s on vacation.
So I did... huge mistake...
He hooked up with me...
I thought he liked me...
1 week later I get a text, “get out of your school...”
His girlfriend and 15 others came including himself...
The girl and 2 others just said, “Look around nobody likes you” in front of my new
school (50) people.
A guy then yelled “just punch her already.”
So she did... She threw me to the ground and punched me several times.
Kids filmed it. I was all alone and left on the ground.
I felt like a joke in this world... I thought nobody deserve this :/
I was alone... I lied and said it was my fault and my idea.
I didn’t want him getting hurt, I thought he really liked me but he just wanted the sex...
Someone yelled “punch her already.”
Teachers ran over but I just went and laid in a ditch and my dad found me.
I wanted to die so bad... when he brought me home I drank bleach...
It killed me inside and I thought I was gonna actually die.
Ambulance came and brought me to the hospital and flushed me.
After I got home all I saw was on Facebook - “She deserved it, did you wash the mud out
of your hair? - I hope she’s dead.”
Nobody cared. I moved away to another city to my mom’s.
Another school... I didn’t wanna press charges because I wanted to move on.
6 months has gone by... people are pasting pics of bleach, Clorex and ditches
tagging me... I was doing a lot better too... They said...
She should try a different bleach. I hope she dies this time and isn’t so stupid.
They said I hope she sees this and kills herself...
Why do I get this? I messed up but why follow me...
I left your guys city... I’m constantly crying now...
Everyday I think why am I still here?
My anxiety is horrible now. never went out this summer.
All from my past... life’s never getting better... cant go to school,
meet or be with people... constantly cutting... I’m really depressed.
I’m on antidepressants now and counseling and a month ago this summer
I overdosed... In hospital for 2 days...
I’m stuck... whats left of me now?... nothing stops.
I have nobody... I need someone :( 
My name is Amanda Todd.
Appendix B “My Secrets” Video Timeline

1965 – Bob Dylan releases “Subterranean Homesick Blues,” arguably the first music video. This music video prominently features cue cards with lyrics on it. Multiple musicians have copied this over the last forty years.

1992- Artist Gillian Wearing produces a photographic project called Signs That Say What You Want Them to Say and Not Signs That Say What Someone Else Wants You to Say, in which strangers hold signs that say what they are thinking. It is the first project of its kind to photograph people revealing personal secrets via note cards.

1994- Gillian Wearing produces a video art project called Confess All On Video. Don’t Worry, You Will Be In Disguise. Intrigued? Call Gillian…. This project is credited with being the invention of the confessional video genre.

2004 – The PostSecret community art project is started by Frank Warren. People send anonymous art postcards disclosing a secret they have never shared with anyone else.
2005, Feb, ---The blog PostSecret.com is started by Frank Warren. Warren photographs and posts ten secrets to his blog every Sunday. The project is still ongoing. Five books of compilations have been published.

2005- The band American Rejects uses actors holding cards from the Post Secret project for their “Dirty Little Secrets” music video. The video has been viewed ten million times on YouTube.

2006, Feb 21 --- The earliest extant example of a fan-made PostSecrets compilation appears on YouTube. It is titled “PostSecret Collage, pt.1” by user aesthesis. Hundreds of compilation videos have since been posted, mostly between 2006 and 2008.

2006, Oct 24--- My Secret: A PostSecret Book is published in 2006. This is the second book by Frank Warren about the PostSecret project. This book is specifically aimed at teens and college students, and shares young people’s secrets.

2007, Aug 12-- PostSecret posts an official video about the project to YouTube.

2008, Jan ----Anna Phan, a self-described “lesbian Asian girl that was raised in a traditional home,” starts a blog called Note Card Confessions on Wordpress and MySpace. People send in anonymous secrets written on notecards that are photographed and published. This blog runs until 2012. A year later this project would inspire new titles for My Secrets style videos.

2008, Jan 3--- The earliest extant example appears of a PostSecret style compilation of personal secrets, rather than pictures from the blog, using “my secrets” in the title. It is titled “Broken-Buildings - My Secrets” by user GothicAngelX3393.

2008, Feb 15 --- Another early example of personal disclosures is posted. It is called “My PostSecret.” Video description: “All my pics with my secrets the post secret project inspired me to open up, so here I go.”

2008, July 3--- A PostSecret style video with personal secrets is posted, most similar to the kinds of disclosures found later. Titled “My Secrets” by user secretsconsumeme.

2008, July 10 ---A video is posted in which a young girl writes her own secret on cards with a magic marker. It is titled “Post Secret” by user sweetbriarfields.

2008, Aug -- MissBroadwayDork,a Latina musical theater actress, posts a video titled “Secrets” using flashcards to tell her secrets. The video is no longer extant on YouTube but video replies are, including a video response titled “My Secrets” from MyPinkRainbow on Sept 13; a video response “re: secrets” posted by user Dave from Waterloo, a middle aged man who made a flash card video about shame Sept 20; and a video by princeword on Sept 25, 2008 which credits MissBroadwayDork for the idea and links to her video.

2008, Sept 11 – A stop motion video titled “My Secrets” uses flashcards to tell four personal secrets. It is posted by user Welcome to my world.
2008, Sept 22-- Vocal coach, music teacher, composer, and musical theater teacher Shelly Bort posts “Shelly Bort Presents: ‘SECRETS’ http://www.shellybort.com/” using flashcards to tell her secrets. She may have been inspired by MissBroadwayDork. She says in her video that she loves the PostSecret project. Her video spawns multiple video replies including: “Secrets” by grobaniteLarisa, a Latina girl who wears a beautiful costume in her video posted on Sept 23; “My Secrets” by Mary Gonzalez on Sept 23; “Secrets inspired by my inspiration” by user Everyone Has The Talent to Do Well on Sept 24; and “re:secrets by shellly bort” by Roxanne Canales on Sept 25. There are several dozen other videos that credit Shelly Bort well into 2010. There is more body diversity in these early videos; many of the women are visibly overweight. These videos list secrets without a narrative through-line. There is a mixture of positive and negative disclosures. The My Secrets video genre has begun.

2008 -- PostSecret is the tenth most popular website for women on the Internet worldwide. YouTube is the second.

2009—My Secrets style videos start being posted under names like “Card Confessions,” “Note Card Confessions,” “My Note Card Confessions,” “Cue Card Confessions,” “Note Card Confessions: My Secrets,” “Note Card Confessions Project,” and so on. These seem to have been inspired by the “Note Card Confessions” blog.

2009, -- A YouTube video for an art school project entitled “I, You, We. Inspired by Gillian Wearing” showcases people holding note cards to tell their secrets.

2010 --- MTV runs a reality television show called If You Only Knew Me, about an anti-bullying intervention team that offers a one day workshop for high school students. Each episode, the show chooses follows five teens who participate in the intervention and share a bit about each of their lives. At the end of the workshop each teen is asked to expose personal details about their lives for each other beginning with the statement “If you only knew me, you would know…” Students disclose family violence and problems relating to poverty. The show runs for one season.

2010 --- My Secrets style videos titled “If You Only Knew Me…” or “If You Really Knew Me” start to become popular. These videos have more of a narrative through-line and disclose more family violence.

2010 --- The social media website Tumblr starts hosting My Secrets Videos. This adds a layer of anonymity for users who prefer not to post on YouTube. Some users start to double-post their videos to Tumblr and YouTube. Titles like “My Tumblr Secrets” start to become popular. Tumblr helps to transform My Secrets into a genre specifically for young people.
2011, Mar 14 --- Justin Bieber reposts a My Secrets video posted on Tumblr by a girl named Jade to his Facebook. In response to subsequent media attention, Jade’s parents delete all of Jade’s social media accounts and rumors fly on Tumblr that she has killed herself. Content on Tumblr cannot be deleted by deleting the source blog and so her video stays on Tumblr. Bloggers on Tumblr looking for news of Jade repost a news story of the suicide death of Jade Hughes, however this story is from 2003. Hundreds of people repost her video from Tumblr onto YouTube with video descriptions that say she killed herself. On July 10, 2011, a friend of hers posts the video on YouTube with an explanation that her parents deleted her account but this does not quell the rumors. Friends also post to Tumblr explaining that her name is Jade Wayslenko, not Hughes, and that she is alive and well. Rumors of her death persist.

2011, Sep 18 – Fourteen-year-old New York teen Jamey Rodemeyer kills himself after posting an It Gets Better video to YouTube.


2011, Nov 10--- Kaitlin Brand’s My Secrets video makes the news. A local Grand Rapids news provider hosts the article: “Kaitlin Brand’s tribute to mother who committed suicide goes viral.” On Nov 14, Yahoo hosts an article titled ‘My Secrets’ Video from Kait Goes Viral: Suicide Prevention Note from a Survivor.” On Nov 11, the Huffington Post also carries a story on Kaitlin. Another article misnames Kait’s video as an “It Gets Better” video.


2011, Nov 30 – Quebec teenager Marjorie Raymond kills herself. Many French teenagers post “My Secrets” video responses titled “Mes Secrets” to Marjorie’s story. It is not clear if these response videos are simply to the story or to a source video made by Marjorie before she took her own life.

2011, Nov --- Fourteen-year-old Jonah Mowry changes the privacy settings on a My Secrets video he made in Aug 2011 about his experiences with bullying from private to public. Lady Gaga, Nick Jonas, Paula Abdul, Ricky Martin, Perez Hilton, and Rosie O’Donnell all repost his video and make supportive comments. He is featured on Good Morning America and in the LA Times. Jonah comes out as gay. After YouTube videos surface of Mowry acting elated, rumours fly over the Internet that he lied. Mowry apologizes for the tone of his video, saying he was excited by the celebrity attention.
2011, Dec 4 – Ottawa teen Emmanuel Peron posts a video titled “My Secrets, My Life” on YouTube. He tells how he was homophobically bullied in spite of the fact that he is straight.

2011, Dec 6 – Salon runs a story on Jonah Mowry, titled “A Viral Video turns a Bullied Teen into a Star.”

2011, Dec 9 – In response to the Jonah Mowry story, local Boston news carries the story of Molli Marshall, a bisexual girl who made a video called “My Secrets Video.” The article is titled “Masconomet Student Takes Message to YouTube after Being Bullied.” Her video is no longer extant.


2011, Dec 18 – YouTube celebrity Ben Breedlove posts “This is My Story,” a two part My Secrets video about his heart condition (hypertrophic cardiomyopathy) and numerous near death experiences. He dies of a heart attack on Christmas Eve. His death draws international media coverage and his sister has since written an biography on him. His video was inspired by a video by Kieran Miles that is no longer extant. Hundreds of videos list Ben Breedlove as an inspiration for their narrator’s My Secrets video.

2012, Jan 5 – A blog article is posted on Voice of America focusing on the My Secrets genre. The article is titled “The Note Card Confessional: Why are so Many Teens Spilling their Secrets on YouTube?”

2012, Jan 9 – Mollydoyle18 posts a video entitled “My Story: Coping from Suicide and Bullying.” Amanda Todd communicates with Mollydoyle18 via YouTube private message.

2012, March – Olivia Penepraze posts her second My Secrets video.

2012, March 13 – The April issue of Seventeen Magazine, which contains an article on the My Secrets genre titled “What’s Your Secret,” hits newsstand in the USA.

2012, April 3 – Olivia Penepraze is taken off life support. She attempted suicide after posting a suicide note to Tumblr on March 29, 2012.

2012, Sept 7 – Amanda Todd posts her video entitled “My Story: Struggling, Bullying, Suicide, Self-Harm” to Youtube.

2012, Oct 10 – Amanda Todd commits suicide on International Mental Health Day.

2012, Nov 10 – The Web Capper weekly YouTube program about “up and coming” teen performers on streaming webpages, dedicates an episode to catching Amanda’s blackmailers. This episode is titled: “The Daily Capper - Information on Amanda Todd, Kody Maxson, & Viper.”

2013, Oct 10 – Wendy Chun gives a talk called “Habitual New Media: Exposing Empowerment” that seems to be the first academic work to mention Amanda Todd and her video.
2014, May 7 – CBC Quebec reports a blogger named Gab Roy has been arrested on charges of incitement to sexual touching, sexual touching, and luring after a girl posts a French Mes Secrets video naming Roy as her attacker. This seems to be the first arrest linked directly to a My Secrets video testimony.
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<td>My secrets video, if you only knew me</td>
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<td>My rape story</td>
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<td>My secrets</td>
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<td>My secrets 2014 [same girl as 026]</td>
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<td>Speak Up: My Story of being Stalked</td>
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<td>My Secrets, R.I.P. Amanda Todd</td>
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<td>VID00</td>
<td>exploited online, bullied by peers, told to kill self, beat up, gendered slurs, “slut,” cutting, hospitalization, suicide attempts</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>killed self Oct 10, 2012, extensive international media coverage</td>
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<td>VID01</td>
<td>relationship violence, cutting, loss of loved ones, homelessness</td>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>VID02</td>
<td>clinically depressed, medication, difficult relationship with father depression, suicidal thoughts</td>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>VID03</td>
<td>bullying, gendered slurs, told to kill self, cutting, suicidal thoughts, grew up poor</td>
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<td>VID04</td>
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<td>VID05</td>
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<td>VID06</td>
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<td>VID07</td>
<td>mother committed suicide, cutting</td>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>VID08</td>
<td>self harm, ocd and bdd diagnosis, very insecure family violence, mother sexually physically abused her, harasses despite restraining order, brother neglected, father neglectful, babysitter molested her</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>VID09</td>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>VID10</td>
<td>bullying, depression, 3 suicide attempts cyberbullying, bullying (gendered slurs), suicide attempt fatherintercepts bullying gendered slurs, “slut, whore”, loss of loved ones: father died when she was 7 sexually abused by step-sister, no one believes her, father testified against her in step-sister trial,</td>
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<td>yes</td>
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<td>VID12</td>
<td>father killed mother in public murder/suicide, bullied at school after for being “attention whore” moved states suicide attempts, medication “psychotic depression and social anxiety” loss of loved ones: mom divorced when she was 5 moved her away from father and sister, cancer surgery (turns out she didn’t have it) bullying, grandfather sexually abused her and her mother, reported to police, cutting sexually assaulted by father, court case found guilty, father called her names in court, bullying at home and school bullying gendered slurs, moving because of bullies, raped by ex boyfriend, lupus frequent hospitalizations, unsupported by school admin, homeschooled raped by british man while on vacation in turkey, esl, cutting, bulimia, “flew back to my country’ not clear where bullying gendered+ homophobic, cutting, anorexia, bulimia, suicide attempts, bf, social anxiety, schizophrenia</td>
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<td>died of heart attack post video, Dec 24, 2011, extensive international news coverage and book</td>
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<td>heart condition, hypertropic cardiomyopathy, near death experiences</td>
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<td>VID-035</td>
<td>relationship violence, bf very jealous, unwanted sex, spit on, slapped, thrown, stalking after break up, lost mom to suicide Molested by foster sister; raped when she was 15; had first child at 16; wants to get children out of projects homophobically bullied, threw rocks and sticks at him; raped at 11; physically abused by mother; manic depressive taking medication; never knew father</td>
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<td>step-dad molested her, found guilty in court bullied + racism, adopted by white family, birth mom rejected her twice, cutting, depression, adhd, hospitalization sister suicide attempt, beat her mom</td>
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<td>depression, eating disorder, no dad mom raises her alone &quot;people hate me&quot;, parents divorced, house burned down when he was 6 (inspired to make video from mtv reality show) father died, mom daing man she is afraid of, lack of support family violence: aunt physically abused her, grandma and aunt bully about overweight, binge eating disorder, suicide attempts, molested, depression sexually assaulted, eating disorder, cutting, smoking, suicide attempts, grandma abusive about weight, medication, ptsd first boyfriend hurt her, misses grandparents, sings in the shower, loves her mom; no narrative through line bullying since grade one, homophobic slurs afraid to go to school; suicidal thoughts: cutting; watched father die; molested by mom's bf; mother murdered by her bf in her sleep with a bat put down a lot, &quot;I'm not the bitch everyone thinks I am&quot;; &quot;miserable&quot; family violence from father, no money, steals a lot, cannot afford university, diabetes, steals mother's pills loss of loved ones: best friend to suicide, hates dad, low self esteem (old style video numbered list)</td>
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<td>V061</td>
<td>boyfriend shared naked pic, bullied about it, changed schools bullied again, police ignored it, gendered slurs called &quot;slut, skank, whore&quot;; suicide attempt molested by best friends uncle, uncle molested best friend too; family doesn't believe her; self harm, eating disorder</td>
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<td>yes</td>
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<td>bullied gendered &quot;Whore, slut&quot;; watched grandmother die</td>
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<td>Mother alcoholic/drug addict, physically abusive; neglected had to cook, look after baby; step-dad good but divorce; cutting; poor Random facts: &quot;I see myself as talentless.&quot; &quot;I always sing while driving alone.&quot; &quot;XBox kept me alive in Grade 10&quot; no narrative through line</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>Random facts: &quot;I've been called an attention whore&quot;; &quot;I trust no one. At least not completely&quot;; no narrative through line Bullying for being fat, glasses; depression; random facts: liking sushi and cats etc.; no narrative through line</td>
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<td>yes</td>
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<td>violence from father; court-mandated visits starting from when she was 3 until she was 12. &quot;He drugged me / threw things at me / hid the phone from me / He even... Squeezed me until I uninated. / Then he'd yell at me more...&quot; bullying, gendered slurs, fights; mom dying of cancer; father absent; depression, anorexia, self harm sexually assaulted at 14, &quot;I don't like to call it sexual assault but they didn't listen when I said no and stop and tried to get away&quot;. Family physically abusive; cancer removed from leg; random facts, no narrative through line Bullied 7-15: molested by brother; family violence between parents until divorce; stranger coerced her sexual pictures online; self harm Bullied &quot;slut, whore&quot;; boyfriend hit her; eating disorder, cutting, left school; new boyfriend now Family violence; father physically abusive, raped her starting at 8, ongoing police investigation; sexually exploited online, cutting bullied in elementary school; loss of loved ones, 2 sisters + grandma; mild depression yes</td>
<td>yes (in video description)</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>killed self, suicide attempt march 29, 2012, off life support April 3, 2012, multiple national media articles (Australia), mention tumblr and YouTube</td>
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<td>Eating disorder; Clinically depressed. Hospitalized after suicide attempt; family problems, supportive friends, bf, sister +wife; has few friends because of her children; wants other baby but dr. convinced her to get tubal ligation; loves being a mom of 2</td>
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<td>VID-092</td>
<td>bullied at school for self harm, suicide attempt, hospitalization; sexually assaulted, raped and molested by step-father from early childhood to teen; court case; bio dad not supportive, did no go to hospital or court case; mom cancer, supportive; Bullying to kill self; family violence: mom’s live in bf beat mom; son of mom’s second bf knifed narrator and beat her; “a guy” beat her and hospitalized her; suicidal, self-harm, institutionalized on suicide watch, now medicated- “it get’s better”</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-093</td>
<td>Eating disorder; Clinically depressed. Hospitalized after suicide attempt; family problems, supportive friends, bf, sister +wife; has few friends because of her children; wants other baby but dr. convinced her to get tubal ligation; loves being a mom of 2</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-094</td>
<td>Eating disorder; Clinically depressed. Hospitalized after suicide attempt; family problems, supportive friends, bf, sister +wife; has few friends because of her children; wants other baby but dr. convinced her to get tubal ligation; loves being a mom of 2</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>VID-095</td>
<td>Eating disorder; Clinically depressed. Hospitalized after suicide attempt; family problems, supportive friends, bf, sister +wife; has few friends because of her children; wants other baby but dr. convinced her to get tubal ligation; loves being a mom of 2</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-096</td>
<td>Eating disorder; Clinically depressed. Hospitalized after suicide attempt; family problems, supportive friends, bf, sister +wife; has few friends because of her children; wants other baby but dr. convinced her to get tubal ligation; loves being a mom of 2</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-097</td>
<td>Eating disorder; Clinically depressed. Hospitalized after suicide attempt; family problems, supportive friends, bf, sister +wife; has few friends because of her children; wants other baby but dr. convinced her to get tubal ligation; loves being a mom of 2</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-098</td>
<td>Eating disorder; Clinically depressed. Hospitalized after suicide attempt; family problems, supportive friends, bf, sister +wife; has few friends because of her children; wants other baby but dr. convinced her to get tubal ligation; loves being a mom of 2</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-099</td>
<td>Eating disorder; Clinically depressed. Hospitalized after suicide attempt; family problems, supportive friends, bf, sister +wife; has few friends because of her children; wants other baby but dr. convinced her to get tubal ligation; loves being a mom of 2</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-100</td>
<td>Eating disorder; Clinically depressed. Hospitalized after suicide attempt; family problems, supportive friends, bf, sister +wife; has few friends because of her children; wants other baby but dr. convinced her to get tubal ligation; loves being a mom of 2</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>VID-101</td>
<td>Eating disorder; Clinically depressed. Hospitalized after suicide attempt; family problems, supportive friends, bf, sister +wife; has few friends because of her children; wants other baby but dr. convinced her to get tubal ligation; loves being a mom of 2</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VID-102</td>
<td>Eating disorder; Clinically depressed. Hospitalized after suicide attempt; family problems, supportive friends, bf, sister +wife; has few friends because of her children; wants other baby but dr. convinced her to get tubal ligation; loves being a mom of 2</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>VID-103</td>
<td>Eating disorder; Clinically depressed. Hospitalized after suicide attempt; family problems, supportive friends, bf, sister +wife; has few friends because of her children; wants other baby but dr. convinced her to get tubal ligation; loves being a mom of 2</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>VID-104</td>
<td>Eating disorder; Clinically depressed. Hospitalized after suicide attempt; family problems, supportive friends, bf, sister +wife; has few friends because of her children; wants other baby but dr. convinced her to get tubal ligation; loves being a mom of 2</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-105</td>
<td>Eating disorder; Clinically depressed. Hospitalized after suicide attempt; family problems, supportive friends, bf, sister +wife; has few friends because of her children; wants other baby but dr. convinced her to get tubal ligation; loves being a mom of 2</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-121</td>
<td>I Am Not My Depression (Meet Jade Response) Meet Jade. The real Jade. [not original poster, reuploaded from tumblr, multiple versions, translated internationally, in french over a million views]</td>
<td>2011-05-23</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>27,881</td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-122</td>
<td>My story - self-harm, depression, anorexia</td>
<td>2013-05-04</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>50,729</td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-124</td>
<td>If you really knew me...</td>
<td>2011-10-31</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td>30,564</td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-125</td>
<td>My Story: Cutting Depression Suicide</td>
<td>2012-10-05</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td>28,619</td>
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<td>VID-126</td>
<td>I have a SECRET...(note cards)</td>
<td>2012-03-13</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td>234,319</td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-127</td>
<td>If You Really Knew Me</td>
<td>2011-07-21</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>1,205</td>
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<td>VID-128</td>
<td>My Secrets c: Shhhhh</td>
<td>2013-08-06</td>
<td>M(trans?)</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>118</td>
<td></td>
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<td>VID-129</td>
<td>It Only Looks Easy: My Story and Confessions</td>
<td>2011-07-26</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>POC</td>
<td>118</td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-130</td>
<td>My secrets</td>
<td>2013-10-13</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>183,435</td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-131</td>
<td>My Secrets TAG!</td>
<td>2011-05-22</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-132</td>
<td>If You Really Knew Me...</td>
<td>2012-01-30</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-133</td>
<td>My Secrets</td>
<td>uglyfaceofbeauty</td>
<td>2014-06-10</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>black</td>
<td>15,148</td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-134</td>
<td>My Story of Dating Abuse/Violence</td>
<td>2012-03-07</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
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<td>VID-135</td>
<td>Secrets Tag .wmv</td>
<td>2011-03-11</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>middle aged</td>
<td>black</td>
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<td>VID-136</td>
<td>Can you keep my secrets? Shh,(;</td>
<td>2011-08-17</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>442,572</td>
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<td>VID-137</td>
<td>Hi my name is Brittany.</td>
<td>2010-11-24</td>
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<td>209,091</td>
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<td>VID-138</td>
<td>Tumblr Secrets</td>
<td>2010-09-19</td>
<td>F</td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-139</td>
<td>You're Not Alone Inspired By Kenna Harris</td>
<td>2011-08-24</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td>504</td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-140</td>
<td>My Secrets Video</td>
<td>2012-02-28</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>48</td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-141</td>
<td>You know my name but not my story</td>
<td>2013-10-30</td>
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<td>VID-142</td>
<td>Tag: My Secrets</td>
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<td>VID-144</td>
<td>clothesencounters I My Secrets</td>
<td>2013-09-22</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Korean American</td>
<td>546</td>
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<td>VID-145</td>
<td>If You Really Knew Me - Pauleanna Reid</td>
<td>2013-12-10</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>black</td>
<td>155,809</td>
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<td>VID-146</td>
<td>My Secrets - Stay Strong for Joshua.</td>
<td>2011-12-08</td>
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<td>first year college</td>
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<td>VID-147</td>
<td>My Tumblr Secrets</td>
<td>2011-04-07</td>
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<td>black</td>
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<td>VID-148</td>
<td>My secrets video</td>
<td>2012-08-12</td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-149</td>
<td>Just My Secrets</td>
<td>2011-06-28</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>VID-150</td>
<td>My Secrets Video</td>
<td>2012-10-13</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-121</td>
<td>bullied, called &quot;fat&quot; and &quot;bitch&quot;; cutting for 3 years; heartbroken and alone</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>March 14, 2011 Justin Beiber reblogs this video. Minor media coverage. Parents deactivate account leading to internet rumors on Tumblr that she is dead. First link with suicide.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-122</td>
<td>Bullied, gendered slurs, &quot;slut&quot;, &quot;whore&quot;. Cutting</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
| VID-123 | Left as a baby by parents, raised in foster care. Mother and grandmother died; two of her friends killed in 2011. Cutting, starving self, smoking, two suicide attempts; mental hospital twice, anorexia diagnosis; "I'm seeing a therapist once a week"; alienated from foster family raped by male friend repeatedly at 12; relived rape with boys; mom had cancer remission; father alcoholic, neglectful, left at 8 when mom had cancer again; cutting 11, 3 suicide attempts after rape; eating disorder
excluded at school; father alcoholic, parents divorced; depressed since 10, multiple diagnosis: depression, social anxiety disorder, ocd; cutting, suicidal, therapist saved her life. | yes                       | yes                    |                             |
| VID-124 | bullied because best friend was a lesbian in grade 7, called "slut" and "whore", girls made an anti-aby club on facebook, assaulted her, 2 bullies expelled, egged her house and sent death threats; changed schools bullying stopped gay, judged for how he looks; old style no narrative through line
bullied for being bi; grandfather psychically abused him, trying to drown him; flinches, afraid friends will hit him; cutting, eating disorder | yes                       | yes                    |                             |
| VID-125 | bullied physically, emotionally; brother in a gang, drugs, beats him up; he is gay, his family is homophobic. Mother calls him a "girl" thinks he is crazy; mom is bipolar; dad supportive but troubled relationship; catholic, loves "god even if god doesn't love" him                             | yes                       | yes                    |                             |
| VID-126 | bullied from 6-15; friend died; bf died a year ago from cancer; depressed; positive disclosures; old style no narrative through line                                                                                 | yes                       | yes                    |                             |
| VID-127 | bullied when parents got divorced; bipolar; suicidal thoughts; has panic attacks; lots of positive disclosures, she's in a band bullied; step father physically abusive to sister and mother; father died when she was 10, aunt got emergency custody, restraining order against mom who is paranoid schizophrenic; misses mom; cutting, suicide attempts, depressed, hospitalized, medicated
no narrative through line; in recovery for self harm and eating disordere
relationship abuse, intimidation, coercion, kicking in doors, punching walls, use of suicide threats, bf harmed himself as coercive tactic, dangerous driving while she was in the car, holding knives to his own throat, cutting himself with glass; take away phone she can't access 911, she pulled knife away from his neck, cut him accidentally; he called police next day; lost friends, people treated her badly, said she had low standards; diagnosed anxiety/panic disorder; made the video for english class
step dad sexually assaulted her from ages 8-10, step brother and another bf of mom also raped her; bio dad went to prison for beating step-daughter, went to hs with her, thought everyone knew; 3 abortions; in second marriage; is an "overprotective" mother because she has been through hell, special needs child; loves her children | yes                       | yes                    | yes                       |
<table>
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<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>content</th>
<th>positive turn</th>
<th>reaches out</th>
<th>false happiness motif</th>
<th>media coverage</th>
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</table>
| VID-136 | Father drove drunk with her + brother in car, hasn't talked to him in 5 months, much happier; positive relationship with stepfather, no narrative through line Mother has alzheimers, doesn't remember her. Narrator helps take care of her. child abuse, sexual abuse restraining order against father; lost virginity in implied sexual assault; self harm, eating disorders bullied, called slut whore; bisexual, homophobically bullied "lesbian"; rumors she was pregnant; parents divorced at 2; molested as child; string of bf's "I can't stand being alone."
| VID-137 | yes                                                                                                                                  |               |             |                       |                |
| VID-138 | VID-138 Mother has alzheimers, doesn't remember her. Narrator helps take care of her. Yes. |
| VID-139 | VID-139 Ever" molested at 4; mom addict, did cocaine with mom; 2 friends died; ptsd; pregnant at 16, single mother, my son's dad tried to hit me I told him to leave he never came back |
| VID-140 | Father left suddenly, when she was 12, no communication since; cutting; suicide attempts; friend Maria, saved her from first suicide attempt and then moved to US; institutionalized, medicated; second suicide attempt; new friends in grade 9 raped by a stranger while walking home; never met biological father; ran away at 16 bullying, attacked on orientation day grade 9; sexually abused as child; difficulty making friends; cutting; visibly overweight; in therapy, multiple diagnosis including social anxiety, generalized anxiety, dependent personality disorder, and depression; only contact w people is over internet bullied for being asian in grade school, distanced self from culture in hs, had folder of fashion models she wanted to be; language barrier between her and her parents, she can't speak Korean well; positive tone; lots of positive disclosures; life is better because of youtube community and "your support" bullied in hs, called "whitewashed"; "bitch", "worthless"; sexually harassed at 13, felt dirty for 10 years after; depressed throughout hs, diagnosed with depression in college; found author of book, everything I couldn't tell my mother, personal stories of 4 women of colour |
| VID-141 | VID-141 Yes. |
| VID-142 | VID-142 Yes. |
| VID-143 | VID-143 |
| VID-144 | VID-144 |
| VID-145 | VID-145 |
| VID-146 | VID-146 |
| VID-147 | VID-147 |
| VID-148 | VID-148 |
| VID-149 | VID-149 |
| VID-150 | VID-150 |

175
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<tr>
<td>VID-151</td>
<td>These Are My Secrets..</td>
<td>2012-05-30</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>black</td>
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<td>VID-152</td>
<td>My Secrets: Tumblr confession</td>
<td>2012-05-24</td>
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<td>VID-153</td>
<td>The Truth-My Notecard Story</td>
<td>2012-03-18</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>black</td>
<td>10,095</td>
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<td>VID-154</td>
<td>secrets video</td>
<td>2010-09-02</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<td>278,212</td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-155</td>
<td>MY story: RAPED BY MY OWN UNCLE.</td>
<td>2012-03-27</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td>8,909</td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-156</td>
<td>My Notecard Story</td>
<td>2011-12-06</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td>VID-157</td>
<td>my secrets video 2010</td>
<td>2010-09-03</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>VID-158</td>
<td>Andre Williams - You know my name, not my story.</td>
<td>2012-01-15</td>
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<td>VID-159</td>
<td>My Secrets Video (rape)</td>
<td>2013-03-05</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>3,146</td>
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<td>VID-160</td>
<td>My Secrets: Tag!</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>black/asian</td>
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<td>VID-162</td>
<td>my secrets video</td>
<td>2012-03-08</td>
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<th>reaches out</th>
<th>false happiness motif</th>
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<tr>
<td>VID-151</td>
<td>Born with cystic hygroma birth defect; bullied whole life because of cystic hygroma, physically, mentally; depressed; self harm, cutting, burning, hitting, starving; 3 suicide attempts, hospitalized; on medication; dyslexic; never had a relationship; no narrative through line</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-152</td>
<td>bullied for teeth and acne; thought she was ugly because boys ignored her, but was because of purity ring; compared to her sisters; depressed; thought about suicide and cutting but didn't go through with it; loves god, singing, acting raped at 13; trust issues; former drug addict and bullimic; diagnosed adolescent bpd, doesn't want to get &quot;crazier&quot;; has suicide countdown on her blog; just wants someone to care deeply</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-153</td>
<td>raped by paternal uncle when she was six, told at 12, mother believed her, father did not; parents divorced, father called her a mistake</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-154</td>
<td>a mistake</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-155</td>
<td>bullied, called slut, whore, worthless; beat up by girls, punched; cyberbullied</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-156</td>
<td>&quot;I get called fat and ugly every day,&quot;; visibly overweight; bipolar; three kinds of medicine; disliked by family except parents; &quot;I have no friends. Tumblr, you're my friend, right?&quot;; no narrative through line</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>VID-157</td>
<td>dad died when he was in 6th grade, mom depressed but family &quot;rock&quot; but died after long illness 2011; diagnosed with cancer at 8, remission 6 years; sings own song in video; drugged and raped at a party on her period, had to get tampon surgically removed; best friend abandoned her at party; visibly overweight</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VID-158</td>
<td>Bullied for being dark skinned and &quot;mixed&quot; multi-racial; molested at 4, family kept it secret; dropped out of school, 3 suicide attempts, homeless; found god, finished GED, loves herself and colour of her skin now</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VID-159</td>
<td>Father diagnosed with MS lives in another city, step mother has breast cancer; angry with mother</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VID-160</td>
<td>Bullied when child; born with cleft palate; Raped by foster father when she was 3; mother says she doesn't lover her; adopted by grandparents</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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